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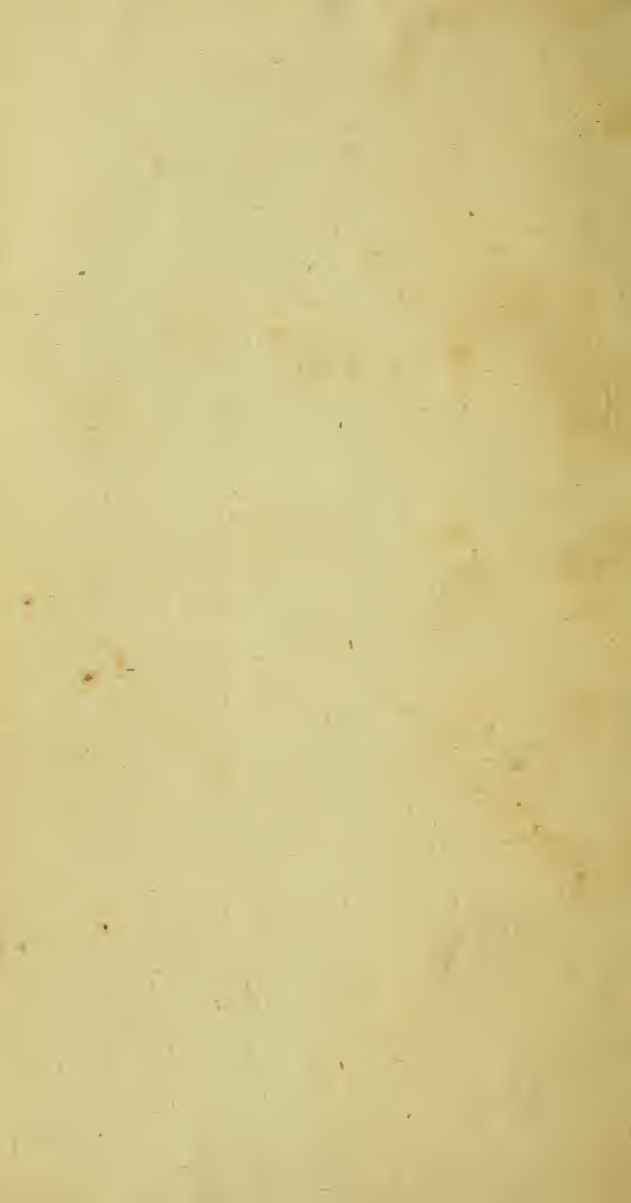
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AN
ESSAY
ON THE
REVOLUTIONS
OF
LITERATURE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN OF
SIG. CARLO DENINA;
PROFESSOR OF ELOQUENCE AND BELLES-LETTRES
IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF TURIN.

By JOHN MURDOCH.

DIFFICILIS MORA IN SUMMO EST. LUCAN.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL IN THE STRAND; J.
ROBSON IN NEW-BOND-STREET; G. WOOD-
FALL AT CHARING-CROSS; AND T. EVANS
IN PATER-NOSTER-ROW.

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*T*HERE is no subject more interesting, there are few perhaps more important, to a liberal mind, than an historical enquiry into the causes of the rise and fall of Literature in different nations. How far SIGNOR DENINA—a name already established—has acquitted himself of the task, it would ill become his TRANSLATOR to determine. It would ill become him to illustrate beauties, or stigmatise defects, if defects should appear, when he has to solicit indulgence to his own performance. Such

as

ADVERTISEMENT.

as that is, it is now submitted to the world. If in any respect he has failed, he has not failed from inattention to his author—if he has succeeded, his warmest wish is gratified.

LONDON, March, 1771.

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Introduction and Plan

OF THE

W O R K.

IF we attentively consider the ancient philosophy, and compare it with the various systems that have appeared in later times, we shall find that, for the most part, the moderns have only renewed, and more fully illustrated, the forgotten opinions of the ancients. Those of PYTHAGORAS and ARISTARCHUS of SAMOS, were revived by COPERNICUS and GALILEO, the principal restorers of the mathematics in the sixteenth century. DES CARTES, still more famous than these two, as the supposed author of a new philosophy, is thought by many to

B

have

2 INTRODUCTION, &c.

have been rather a follower of PLATO, and the other philosophers, than the founder of a system. Even the impious tenets of HOBBS and SPINOSA, were formerly maintained by the GREEK ARCHELAUS, and perhaps some of them by the JEWISH CABALISTS. I shall not insist upon GASSENDI, and others since, who rescued from oblivion, and defended, the doctrine of EPICURUS and ZENO; as these did not profess to publish new systems, but only to restore and elucidate those of antiquity. The famous LEIBNITZ endeavoured to reconcile ARISTOTLE with the modern philosophers: and the illustrious father Gerdil lately undertook to demonstrate a great conformity betwixt LEIBNITZ and PYTHAGORAS. Several learned physicians of this century have likewise confessed, that almost all medical knowledge is derived from antiquity.

BUT

INTRODUCTION, &c. 3

BUT although some hints of the modern doctrines are to be found in their writings, it must be confessed that natural philosophy, medicine, and the mathematics, have been greatly illustrated and improved by modern observations and experiments : nor can it be doubted that in these, by continued diligence, we shall make further progress every day. How different is it with literature ! After a certain period of barbarity and ignorance, this ever emerges, different in appearance indeed, but intrinsically the same. The more we endeavour to produce new beauties, the more we impair its native energy and grace : a convincing argument that as its foundation and design is to represent human nature and manners, which are, and always were, essentially uniform, so its spirit is one, inviolable, and immortal ; that we ought, above all things, to guard against the dazzling allurements of novelty, and fly from the paths

4 INTRODUCTION, &c.

of those who have, however successfully, left the guidance of Nature.

HAVING observed that the literary taste so eminent in the ages of ALEXANDER, AUGUSTUS, LEO the tenth, and LEWIS the fourteenth, decayed in a short time, I began to consider the causes of this vicissitude; when after much reflection, I happened to read many ingenious thoughts of DUBOS (1), RACINE (2), MEHEGAN (3), LACOMBE (4) and ALGAROTTI (5); all of whom have touched upon this subject. Some of them, however, did not, in my opinion, point out the true causes of it, some did

(1) *Réflexions sur la peinture, & la poésie.* Par. 2. sect. 12. & seq.

(2) *Réflexions sur la poésie.*

(3) *Considérations sur les révolutions des arts.*

(4) *Spéctacle des beaux arts.* Chap. 3.

(5) *Saggio sopra l'opinione, che gli ingegni fioriscano tutti in un medesimo tempo.*

not

not sufficiently consider and explain them. Employing themselves chiefly on the decline of literature, they neglected its origin, and the principles and causes of its advancement. Others again handled the subject so as barely to satisfy the reader's curiosity, without directing him to the genuine paths of taste. I resolved, therefore, to lay down as distinctly as I could, this agreeable and important subject. I shall not, however, limit myself to a bare refutation of what may appear to me false in the above or other writers, but shall point out, in the manner of an universal history, the principles and reasons which made the spirit of letters flourish or decay, that we may be enabled to apply them as guards against the common corruptions, or to adopt for our guides such authors as we shall find to have shone with distinguished lustre in the golden ages of literature.

6 INTRODUCTION, &c.

THE arts and sciences do not properly belong to my subject. My remarks on these, therefore, will be only occasional, and confined to the style and manner in which they are handled. To conclude, I esteem it necessary, notwithstanding my intended brevity, to mention at large the revolutions of literature in those nations, ancient or modern, whose books or language more nearly relate to our own, and are more generally studied and imitated by us.

A N
E S S A Y, &c.

C H A P. I.

I. *The dawnings of literature among the ancients.* II. *The first age of it among the Greeks--- of HOMER, and HESIOD.* III. *Of their lyric and dramatic poets.* IV. *Why poetry preceded the other branches of the belles-lettres.* V. *Of their historians and philosophers.* VI. *Of HERODOTUS, THUCYDIDES, PLATO, and HIPPOCRATES.* VII. *Of the GRECIAN orators.* VIII. *Of the reign of ALEXANDER, and of ARISTOTLE in particular.* IX. *The decline of literature in GREECE.* X. *Of the poets who flourished after the age of ALEXANDER.*

THE success of the arts and sciences generally depends upon the internal disposition and genius of those who cultivate them,

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sometimes upon the external situation of affairs. As in some ages on account of the barbarity of the people, and the universal confusion of civil government, so in the infancy of the world, upon these and other accounts, it was almost impossible that a spirit of literature should take root and flourish. Hence it is, that although in the course of many centuries, both before and after the deluge, it is to be presumed there were men of good understanding, enquirers after truth and the nature of things ; yet in the fluctuating state of the republics, and little wandering monarchies of those days, especially after the confusion of tongues, men naturally intent upon the mechanical arts, and the pursuits immediately necessary for the support of life, could not pay much attention to the study of letters.

THE

THE ÆGYPTIANS, who enjoyed a regular form of government earlier than any other nation, were likewise the first who applied themselves to the sciences and belles-lettres. But their whole learning being either expressed in hieroglyphics, or confined to the order of priests, who were jealous of it, as of their particular inheritance, it did not arrive at that pitch of excellence, which is only to be attained by the mutual emulation of the ingenious. Learning, however, had its first and most necessary improvement from the ÆGYPTIANS, who having either discovered themselves, or learned from their neighbours, the use of letters, communicated this knowledge to the PHÆNICIANS (1);

(1) Οἱ δὲ φοῖνικες ἀλλά τε πολλὰ
 ἐσῆγαγον διδασκαλία ἐς τὰς Ἑλλήνας, καὶ δὴ καὶ γραμ-
 ματα οὐκ ἰόντα πρὶν Ἑλλήσι. Herodot. Lib. 5.
 Cap. 58.

and these carried it into GREECE (2), a country more adapted to literature, where it sprung up and flourished.

To investigate from what fountain the GREEKS drew that learning, and those truths, which they diffused through works of so many different kinds, is not so easy as some may imagine. The wonders which the history of philosophy relates of the wisdom of the ÆGYPTIAN priests, the CHALDÆANS, the BRACHMANS, and the other ancient sages, and the journies which the GRECIAN philosophers undertook

(2) I have here followed the opinion of TACITUS (Ann. lib. XI. Cap. 4.) without entering into the controversy among the critics, which of the oriental nations first used the alphabet, and whether the PHÆNICIANS invented the characters which they introduced into GREECE, or only borrowed them from the ASSYRIANS or ÆGYPTIANS.

in order to cultivate an acquaintance with them, make it probable that from those sources were derived many valuable parts of learning, and useful principles of science; but as no genuine fragment of any ÆGYPTIAN, CHALDÆAN, or PHÆNICIAN author has come down to us, it is likewise probable that in these nations literature never attained the same perfection as in GREECE.

NOR do I think it proper to enquire whether the GREEKS were acquainted with the books of MOSES, or whether even the PHÆNICIANS and ÆGYPTIANS had seen and taken their doctrines from thence. It appears to me, indeed, more honourable to human reason, and at the same time no wise prejudicial to religion, to suppose that the GRECIAN and other ancient sages might of themselves have discovered many truths that are to be found in the

XI, cap. 10.

and the conformity between the sacred history (3) and the fables of the ancient poets shews that the traditions, which they have partly preserved, partly altered and corrupted, were originally those which are recorded in scripture (4).

II. BE that as it may, the origin of literature is so uncertain and obscure, that we must consider and revere HOMER as the father of it. Whether that divine poet bor-

(3) V. Gerdil Introd. allo studio della relig. part. 1.
lib. 1, paragr. 2.

(4) I cannot better illustrate this remark on the history of ancient philosophy, than by referring to what Father GERDIL says in his introduction to the study of religion, as Father NICOLAI, a very learned man, particularly in these matters, tells us (Lect. 18. upon Genesis, vol. xi. page 334) that Father GERDIL throws such new lights upon the doctrines of the ancient philosophers, that had
or ÆGY^{his} his book sooner, he would have made a proper use
ceeding lectures.

rowed

rowed from others, to us unknown, the fables of his two great poems, or invented them himself, it is certain that the *ILIAD* and *ODYSSEY* are, exclusive of the sacred books, not only the most noble and ancient monuments of literary merit extant, but are such perfect models of the epic, that in the course of so many succeeding ages, there was no poet in *GREECE* worthy to be reckoned his second; and the heroic poets of other nations have acquired applause only in proportion as their works approached his.

It is indeed amazing that, after these two capital works, in which, besides establishing a perfect standard of elocution, the seeds of universal knowledge are so liberally strewed (5), so long a time should elapse before any piece, even of another

(5) In Homero nullius non artis, aut perfecta, aut certe non dubia vestigia reperiuntur. Quintil. lib XI, cap, 10.

kind, was produced worthy of the like estimation. Whether the inherent indolence of mankind, the more pressing necessity of attending to the arts requisite for the support of life, the havoc of wars, the barbarity of the laws, the disorders of government, or a want of proper subjects, hindered the GREEKS from cultivating the belles-lettres; true it is, that nothing appeared for above three hundred years after HOMER, that deserved the notice of posterity. Of HESIOD alone, the period of whose existence has so much puzzled the critics to determine, some pieces remain, which are as void of invention and fancy, as they are replete with elegance and harmony of style (6).

III. A LONG time after this, and about six hundred years before CHRIST, whilst philo-

(6) Ηεσίόδου ἐφροντίσεν ὀνοματῶν λειότητος καὶ συντέτακσεως ἐμελε. Dionys. Halicar.

Raro assurgit Hesiodus. Quintil.

sophy

sophy began to flourish under THALES in the GRECIAN provinces of ASIA MINOR, the belles-lettres assumed a new spirit. Nine lyric poets of each sex, and of a sprightly wit, who all flourished within little more than an hundred years, adorned the Muses with inexpressible charms. Among these, ALCÆUS (7), who had occasionally handled morality and politics, was distinguished for sublimity and force. At the same time, the solemnity with which the public games were celebrated in the several cities of GREECE, and the applause gained by the victors, afforded ample field for the Ode, which by the happy imagination and spirit of PINDAR, was raised to an incredible degree of majesty and pomp. But of so many poets, scarce have a small fragment of SAPPHO, a few odes of ANA-

(7) Ἀλκαίου δὲ σκόπει μελαλοφύεις, καὶ βραχὺ,
καὶ περὶ ἀπάντων τὸ τῶν πολιτικῶν ἥθος. Dionys.
Halicar.

CREON,

CREON, and only four of PINDAR's seventeen works, escaped the ravages of time. The spirit of obscenity which breathed through the whole of them, induced, perhaps, the Christian pastors to bury them in oblivion. From the specimens, however, that have come down to us, and from the praises which the ancients have bestowed, particularly SAPPHO, ALCÆUS, STESICHORUS, and PINDAR, it is probable that lyric poetry never shone so eminently, either before or since, in any nation.

EPIC and lyric poetry, and perhaps other kinds less known, gave rise to theatrical compositions, and particularly to tragedy, which arrived at perfection in less time than any other branch of literature.

HITHERTO letters had been indifferently cultivated over all GREECE, as well as ASIA,
MINOR.

MINOR. But when the wise laws of SOLON had begun to render ATHENS a well-governed republic, and the victories of the ATHENIANS had introduced plenty and an honourable ease into their city, the seat of letters became in a manner confined to ATTICA. The drama first succeeded, a work which must be preceded by other pieces of poetry from which it takes its rise, and cannot be properly regulated, and carried to perfection, but in a city such as ATHENS was in the time of PERICLES, in which security, freedom, and ease naturally led to such entertainments. About one hundred and fifty years before CHRIST, THESPIS brought upon the scaffold one actor to relieve two other performers who sung and danced; and in this consisted the whole tragedy of those days (8). The applause which THESPIS gained induced others to follow his example; and before the

(8) V. Castelvetro, poet. Aristot. part 4.

expiration of half a century, tragedy was raised to such perfection by SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, that the few remaining pieces of these authors are still considered as the most perfect models of the kind. Comedy too, it is probable, would have been no less successful under ARISTOPHANES, if the form which it assumed at first, as injurious to the principal persons of the state, and prejudicial to good government, had not been necessarily suppressed.

IV. and V. It may not be improper to observe, that many poets, and all excellent in their several kinds, flourished in GREECE, before one tolerable prose writer appeared. Harmony is so agreeable and natural to the human ear, that the first philosophers were justly afraid that their works would be neglected if written in the common, unelevated style.

HENCE

HENCE it is, that the philosophers either wrote nothing (9), or wrote in verse, as SOLON, SIMONIDES, and EMPEDOCLES; or if any one attempted prose, he clothed his sentiments in allegory, as ÆSOP, whose fables, so universally was poetry preferred to prose, SOCRATES wanted to reduce into verse. But when a number of poets had polished and enriched the language with lively and metaphorical expressions, and fixed the rules of inflection; when the GREEKS, becoming more civilized, began to relish what was solid and real, prose was studied, and soon attained equal perfection.

VI. HERODOTUS was the first, for aught we know, who attempted a regular history in GREEK. The applause that the poetical colouring with which he has adorned it, and

(9) V. la pref. del Fiveri al suo poema della redenzione.

the resemblance it bears to HOMER, gained him at the OLYMPIC games, roused THUCYDIDES to correct the too florid style of his predecessor. These two not only served as models to succeeding historians, but perhaps were no small encouragement to the philosophers to publish their doctrines in prose. Before HERODOTUS, no philosopher, that we know of, wrote in prose with any method or grace; TIMÆUS, the PYTHAGOREAN, excepted, whose age is not yet ascertained, who has left us a treatise of the SOUL OF THE WORLD. But ARCHYTAS, ARCHELAUS, OCELLUS, and PHILOLAUS, who were, perhaps, more ancient than HERODOTUS, soon became disregarded, when PLATO, by compiling and correcting their opinions, and publishing the doctrines which he had received from the mouth of SOCRATES, and from some of the disciples of PYTHAGORAS (10)

(10) Gerdil. part. 1. lib. 2. parag. 2.

(who

(who were not all equally scrupulous in observing the silence enjoined by their master) had treated philosophy in that poetic style, which rendered his writings not only agreeable to his cotemporaries, accustomed to the harmony of verse, but universally admired by posterity (11). XENOPHON likewise wrote in elegant prose, upon useful and important subjects.

THE truly solid and useful part of physic, had, about this time, at once its birth and perfection. What PLATO did in philosophy, the great HIPPOCRATES accomplished in medicine, with still more advantage to mankind. He selected the most valuable observations of former physicians, which,

(11) Πάντων τούτων μάλιστα ὁ Πλάτων, ἀπὸ τοῦ Ὀμηρικοῦ ἐκείνου νόματος εἰς αὐτὸν μυρίας ὄσας παρατροπὰς ἀποχετευσάμενος, &c. Long. sect. 13.

with

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with his own, he published in the IONIC dialect, and formed not only the first, but perhaps the most useful system that the world ever saw (12).

VII. THE harangues which the principal citizens, as MILTIADES, THEMISTOCLES, and PERICLES, held in the forum, had been hitherto nervous, but unpolished; and except those inserted in the histories of HERODOTUS and THUCYDIDES, none were published that might serve as models of eloquence. That ardour with which every considerable citizen, during the height of ATHENIAN power and liberty, promoted the interest of his own faction, joined to the universal desire of speaking and writing elegantly, carried the art of rhetoric to such perfection that succeeding orators have

(12) Vid. Halleri addit. ad Boerhaav. meth. stud. Medic. de Semiotica,

formed no higher wish, than to approach the eloquence of DEMOSTHENES, ÆSCHINES, LYSIAS, HYPERIDES and ISOCRATES.

VIII. SUCH was the situation of letters when the republic of ATHENS, and the other states of GREECE, were subjected to the MACEDONIAN monarch. The reign of ALEXANDER is commonly styled the golden age of GRECIAN literature. This, however, must not be understood as if through his influence learning flourished at that period; since the most illustrious poets, historians, and philosophers, were already famous before the commencement of his reign. Perhaps his beneficence to ARISTOTLE gained him this reputation. And indeed, as before ALEXANDER, GREECE, and particularly ATHENS, abounded in authors, who for genius and imagination, expression of the passions and nature, as well as elegance
of

of style, have been deservedly the admiration and envy of posterity, so in his reign a new composition appeared, which is the criterion of taste, which depends upon penetration, industry, much reading, mature reflection, and practical observations. Thus, when poets and orators, or rather the subjects of poetry and oratory failed, that was reduced into an art, which had been formerly the offspring of genius and nature. This had its rise from ARISTOTLE, and be his philosophy what it will, he will ever deserve, upon many accounts, the grateful thanks of all true lovers of science. His natural philosophy his metaphysics and logic, find indeed opponents, and perhaps with justice; but none can deny that he was more intimately acquainted with, and more fully explained the manners and passions of mankind than any other; and that his reflections upon poetry and rhetoric, have ever been the truest standards

standards of composition, and models of criticism. From him natural history took its first form ; and if all his experiments have not been confirmed in later ages, they at least served as guides to succeeding enquirers into the animal and vegetable world : and if we may believe a celebrated FRENCH author (13) the natural history of ARISTOTLE contains something more solid and more great than the generality of our late systems. Acuteness, solidity and accuracy were certainly almost peculiar to him, and in some measure to his disciple THEOPHRASTUS . It must, however, be confessed, that at this time letters had suffered a considerable change to the worse, not from the loss of liberty, but from their nature, which is ever subject to decay, and from the ambition of the literati themselves.

IX. DEMETRIUS PHALEREUS, a man no wise inferior to the most applauded orators

(13) M. de Buffon manière de traiter l'histoire naturelle.

before him, finding that the proper path of eloquence was now trite, and the palm of noble simplicity and natural grandeur already carried off, resolved to be the first or only follower of a new species of rhetoric, rather than by imitating his predecessors always to remain in obscurity (14). He addicted himself, therefore, to a figurative, flowery, polite, but soft and effeminate style, which, by its novelty, universally pleased, and in him, indeed, animated by the force and vivacity of superior genius, had some merit, but the herd of imitators quickly sunk into the utmost languor, and extinguished every spark of solid eloquence. Those who pretend that this corruption sprung from the dissolution of popular government betray their ignorance of the track in which lite-

(14) Demetrius primus inclinasse eloquentiam dicitur. Quint lib. 10. cap. 1. Cic. orat. cap. 17. & de orat. lib. 2. c. 23.

rature ever uniformly walks. Such reasoning, might have some weight indeed, if we spoke of that eloquence alone which reigns in the assemblies of the people, to which emulation, jealousy, and the spirit of party, add an inconceivable fire and vigour. Examples of this may be seen in the oration of DEMOSTHENES in defence of CRESIPHON, in those of CICERO for the recovery of his house, and in defence of MILO, and in the PHILIPPICS of both these orators (15). But a good citizen will never wish the advancement of that eloquence, which can only flourish in revolutions, civil wars, and the downfall of government; and it is certain, that true oratory may appear in a thousand shapes which have little, if any, dependance upon political systems. But in the time of DEMETRIUS none of the other branches of literature retained their former lustre.

(15) Vid. Dial. de caus. corrup. eloq. circa finem.

Compared with HOMER and PINDAR, ARATUS and APOLLONIUS RHODIUS, how groveling and languid ! ARCHIMEDES and EUCLID, although the fathers of mathematics, cannot be put in competition with PLATO ; and the more useful they are in the sciences and mathematics, the less are they known for elegance and purity of style.

X. ABOUT the time of DEMETRIUS, however, two or three species of poetry, which had not been formerly cultivated with equal taste, flourished, in the court of king PHILADELPHUS, by the beneficence of this prince in ALEXANDRIA. That species of comedy which brings fictitious personages upon the stage, different from that of ARISTOPHANES, CRATINUS, and EUPOLIS, who introduced the names and characters of real persons alive at the time, and sometimes present, was greatly refined by MENANDER.

CALLI-

CALLIMACHUS surpassed MIMNERMUS, SIMONIDES, THEOGNIS, and his other predecessors in elegy; and pastoral poetry was at once introduced and carried to perfection by THEOCRITUS, BION and MOSCHUS. But a few years after the death of DEMETRIUS and these poets, the true spirit of literature, by degrees, disappeared in GREECE, partly because no prince after PHILADELPHUS patronised it, partly because the former writers had exhausted every valuable subject, and thus laid their successors under the necessity of either treading in the same steps, or deviating into wrong paths.

I MUST not omit, that even among the GREEKS, whom we consider as the fountains of every science, the decline of taste proceeded chiefly from an abuse of that which, used moderately, forms the beautiful and sublime. PLATO was chiefly celebrated

by the GREEK critics for his use of figures, yet in the opinion of LONGINUS he runs into too great boldness of metaphor, and an allegorical bombast (16). Harmonious diction, no doubt, adds lustre to composition; but DEMETRIUS, endeavouring to make his style brilliant by frequent figures, and agreeable by exquisite harmony, rendered what used to heighten eloquence subservient to its ruin. It is not easily determined who produced the same effect in poetry; but most probably it proceeded from the same cause. The heathen mythology afforded the ancient poets an admirable variety for every composition; and they always endeavoured to enrich their verses with an historical fact or scientific observation. But PHILETAS, an

(16) *Επὶ γὰρ τοῦτοις καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα οὐχ ἥκιστα διαφέρουσι, πολλὰκις, — — εἰς ἀκράτους καὶ ἀπηθένης μεταφορὰς καὶ εἰς ἀλληγορικὸν στόμφον ἐκφερόμενον.*
Long. Sect. 2.

elegiac poet, by his pedantic display of erudition, fell into, what of all things he seemed to avoid, dullness and sterility : and EUPHORION, who wanted to allude on every occasion to some fable, lost, and made his imitators lose, equally with PHILETAS, the true spirit of poetry, which consists in a natural simplicity, and a moderate use of learning.

C H A P. II.

- I. *Migration of literature into ITALY.*
- II. *The first establishment of it in Rome.*
- III. *The golden age of Latin letters.* IV. *and V. Comparison of the ROMAN and GREEK writers.* VI. *Decline of taste in ITALY—The causes of it.* VII. *From whom it sprung.* VIII. *Sentiments of VELLEIUS PATERCULUS and SENECA on that subject.* IX. *Why CELSUS and PHÆDRUS were free from the general corruption.*

SUCH is the nature of the belles-lettres that, by passing from one nation to another, they resume that spirit which, after a certain period of life and vigour, generally languishes and dies away. Whilst in GREECE literature declined so fast that in a short time it was cultivated only by sophists and
rhe-

rhetoricians, involved in scholastic darkness, the GRECIAN power and grandeur likewise fell; and the ROMANS, now masters of the world, and hitherto acquainted with arms and politics alone, began to converse with the GREEKS, who, instructing their conquerors, introduced a taste for letters into ITALY. The decrees of the senate (1) which banished philosophers and rhetoricians, and the anxiety which CATO expressed to remove from ROME CARNEADES, and the other learned men who came ambassadors from GREECE (2), seemed to render the establishment of literature in that warlike republic a desperate attempt. But this aversion to the fine arts did not last long. The independence of the state being secured by the destruction of CARTHAGE, and the luxury of the citizens encreased by the victories

(1) A. Gell. noct. Attic. lib. 15, cap. ult.

(2) Plutarch, in Cat.

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in ASIA, the learned, and artists of every kind, flocked from the conquered provinces for retreat and support to the victorious city.

II. THEN poetry began to form and harmonise the LATIN tongue. Then LIVIUS ANDRONICUS, (in whom the first æra of ROMAN poetry may be fixed) ACCIUS, PACUVIUS, AFRANIUS and PLAUTUS in the drama, ENNIUS in the epopee, LUCILIUS in satire, first brought the ROMANS to a just value of their native language (3). Till this time nothing in prose could please. CICERO, who has often quoted these poets, has scarce any citations in prose ; and although he appears to have read some orations of the GRACCHI, of GALBA, and of CATO, it is evident from his dialogues (4), that very

(3) V. Walch. hist. critic. ling. Lat. Voss. de poet. Lat.

(4) Cic. de clar. orator.

few took that trouble. Some ancient histories indeed such as the annals of the PONTIFEX MAXIMUS and of FABIVS PICTOR, were transcribed and read, from the necessity of knowing the transactions of the republic ; but the coarseness of the style and composition quickly sunk them into oblivion, when the ROMAN story could be learned from more regular and polite historians.

III. BUT the LATIN language being fixed by the poets, particularly TERENCE, the learned and ingenious began in a few years universally to adopt it. NIGIDIUS and VARRO were the first who handled literary and scientific subjects in prose (5) ; but the obscurity of the former soon rendered him disregarded and unknown, and the undistinguishing ravages of time have left us scarce any remains of the latter. Soon

(5) A. Gellius lib. 20. cap. 14.

after, CICERO raised the ROMAN literature to such perfection, that he alone may be opposed to PLATO, DEMOSTHENES, and ARISTOTLE. In history, SALLUST, C. NEPOS, and CÆSAR, excelled even HERODOTUS, THUCYDIDES, and XENOPHON. Then arose VIRGIL at once to equal THEOCRITUS, HESIOD and HOMER. HORACE, not inferior perhaps to the GREEKS in the ode, introduced a species of satire unknown even to them. In elegy, TIBULLUS and PROPERTIUS expressed all the passion, tenderness and gallantry of CALLIMACHUS.

IV. and V. BUT notwithstanding these efforts, however great, the GREEKS were still possessed of almost the whole merit of invention. Had the generality of the GREEK authors come down to our time, as a few entire ones and some fragments have, the world, I am convinced, would be satisfied that the

LATIN

LATIN authors have done little more than copy the poetical beauties of the former, if we except a few alterations and allusions to their own history and government. The comedies of PLAUTUS and TERENCE, it is well known, are for the most part borrowed, even to the last scene, from MENANDER, EPICARMUS, DIPHILUS, PHILEMON, and others; and CICERO confirms me in the supposition (6) that ACCIUS, PACUVIUS, and the other tragic poets of ROME imitated, in the same manner, SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES. How much was even CICERO himself indebted to PANÆTIUS, PLATO, ARISTOTLE, and THEOPHRASTUS! His philosophical writings are little more than a compilation from them; and almost every thing ingenious or valuable in his ART of RHETORIC he had from ARISTOTLE, as he himself informs us, in the

(6) Cicer. Academic. lib. 1. cap. 3.

person of ANTHONY, in the second book DE ORATORE. Every body knows the assistance which VIRGIL had from THEOCRITUS in his eclogues, and the collections he made for his Georgics from the authors upon agriculture. His ÆNEID (7), likewise, is well known to be nothing more than HOMER's two poems interwoven into one. VIRGIL, indeed, adapting the sentiments to monarchy, the new form of government, civilised his heroes, who, in reality, were not more modern than those of his master, and represented them in a light more agreeable to the manners of his own times; whereas the other had drawn them rude and simple, as they certainly were a thousand years before the reign of AUGUSTUS. But if VIRGIL is superior to HOMER in accuracy and art, it must be confessed that the invention and imagery belong entirely to the other. We

(7) Vid. Scalig. Poet. lib. 5. cap. 7. et Voss. de imitat.

cannot

cannot trace so close an imitation in HORACE, CATULLUS, or TIBULLUS, as the GREEK poets from whom these probably borrowed are now lost. But if we may judge from the poem of BERENICE's hair, which CATULLUS took from CALLIMACHUS; his ode from SAPPHO, a fragment of which in the original LONGINUS has transmitted to us; the elegy against IBIS, which OVID borrowed from CALLIMACHUS; the odes, "Quem virum, aut heroa——
 "Nunc est bibendum—Descende cælo, et
 "dic age tibia.—Sic te diva potens Cypri," in which we find that HORACE has imitated PINDAR, ALCÆUS, ALCMAN, and CALLIMACHUS, it is probable that in many other places they have done the same.

NOTHING is farther from my design than either to prove the necessity of imitation, or to lay down rules for it. But I must observe that nature, which is the only true source of

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composition, being in all ages uniform, men of the greatest talents often undesignedly use the same sentiments ; which, however, deservedly acquire the reputation of novelty from the manner and language in which they are expressed. Thus when LUCRETIVS, (8) PROPERTIVS, (9) and HORACE (10) pretend to be the authors of a new species of poetry, it must only be understood that they were the first ROMANS who attempted to

(8) *Avia pieridum peragro loca nullius ante*

Trita solo, &c.

Lucret. lib. 1.

(9) *Primus ego ingredior puro de fonte sacerdos*

Italia per Graios orgia ferre choras. Propert. lib. 3. eleg. 1.

(10) ——— *Carmina non prius*

Audita——

Virginibus puerisque canto.

Horat. od. 1. lib. 3.

Dicar,——

Princeps, Æolium carmen ad Italos

Deduxisse modos.

Ibid. od. ult.

Non ante vulgatas perartes

Verba loquor socianda chordis,

lib. 4. od. 9.

treat

treat philosophy in verse, to write odes or elegies ; since it is evident that LUCRETIVS, in particular, did nothing but illustrate the doctrines of EPICURUS.

It is true that satire, which LUCILIUS introduced, and HORACE refined, was, if we except a few traces of it in the ancient comedy, (11) utterly unknown to the GREEKS. Many epistles and odes of HORACE are likewise entirely his own ; those, for instance, whose subject is the history, grandeur, and majesty of the ROMAN republic and government.

It must, however, be remarked, that lyric, as well as elegiac, epistolary, satiric, and epigrammatic poetry, the subject of which may be any trifling fact or character, or a particular passion, comprehend a greater variety and extent than either comedy, tragedy, or the epopee. In these the manners should

(11) Hor. lib. 1. sat. 4.

all be common and universal, and the minute affections employ but an inconsiderable part.

HENCE, in such little poems any one endued with an happy imagination, and a brilliant wit, may succeed if at the same time he is possessed of that simplicity and purity of style, that elegance of expression, that natural gentility, which we admire in CATULLUS and TIBULLUS, in the satires, epistles, and many of the odes of HORACE.

VI. As there are never wanting licentious and ambitious minds, who esteem the simple and natural, low and mean, and condemn every thing but what is uncommon, hence proceeds the fall of literature, and the corruption of taste.

THIS it was that extinguished in less than a century after LATIN literature had received its first lustre from CICERO, CÆSAR, and TERENCE, that characteristic simplicity, which

which appeared so eminent in these authors, and in SALLUST, LIVY, NEPOS, VIRGIL, TIBULLUS, and HORACE.

VII. THE first step towards the decline of taste was taken even in the reign of AUGUSTUS, nay by the principal literati of the age. ASINIUS POLLIO, MECÆNAS, and MESSALA CORVINUS, it is more than probable, paved the way for the corruption of eloquence, PROPERTIUS for that of poetry. Not that these authors were undeserving of applause, but this fatal effect flowed from the prejudices which their works insinuated into their admirers. ASINIUS POLLIO, who never ceased carping at CICERO, whom he sometimes, however, awkwardly praised for the sake of decorum, greatly conduced to wean the ROMANS from that fountain of LATIN oratory; and his son ASINIUS GAL-LUS, who wrote a book expressly against
CICERO,

CICERO, sufficiently shews to what a height a contempt of the fathers of true and solid eloquence had already sprung up. From SENECA and QUINTILIAN we learn the effeminacy of MECÆNAS's style; and MESSALA carried his expressions to such rhetorical refinement and delicacy, that his imitators could not but fall into the most glaring affectation. TIBERIUS CÆSAR, whose orations were taxed with affectation even by his uncle AUGUSTUS (12), was one of these; and his poetry, by an imitation of EUPHORION, who has been already mentioned, became obscure from excessive care. PROPERTIUS, as I hinted above, had already introduced pedantry and obscurity into the LATIN poetry. Neglecting that natural purity which we admire in TIBULLUS, he filled his elegies with endless allusions to fable. In this he followed PHILETAS the GRECIAN,

(12) Sueton. in Tib. cap. 70. & in August. cap. 86.

who from too ambitious a display of his genius and learning was reckoned by the ancients inferior to CALLIMACHUS. On the one hand PROPERTIUS (although, considered by himself, he deserves an honourable place among the LATIN poets) induced many writers, in order to show their learning, to attempt his manner, which, as it is more full of allusions and erudition, is less natural and agreeable; on the other, there is reason to believe that OVID, who had undoubtedly a great and happy genius, encouraged others to publish, with an affected negligence, whatever their luxuriant imagination suggested. OVID was undoubtedly superior to all the poets of the AUGUSTAN age in genius and poetical fancy: but by his licentious flights, and overcharging his pictures with colouring, he passed the bounds of propriety and nature, and was less esteemed than any of them. Although his style, therefore, had not been

so refined, his conceits not so extravagant, it may be easily conceived what would have been the fate of his less ingenious imitators.

VIII. BE that as it may, it is impossible to find a testimony of greater authority, or in my opinion a more probable reason, for the sudden change of the ROMAN literature, than that of VELLEIUS PATERCULUS, who lived at that time, that is, at the beginning of the reign of TIBERIUS. This historian not only shews by his own laboured periods and refinement, unlike the bold and noble simplicity of CÆSAR and SALLUST, but likewise expressly declares, that in his time literature was already visibly on the decline. Hence he takes occasion to consider why both in ROME and ATHENS the fine arts, after attaining the highest perfection, had so suddenly decayed; and gives
a reason

a reason which, in my opinion, ought to have been adopted by all who have since written on that subject. But some of these, particularly the Abbé DUBOS (13), employing themselves in maintaining the influence of physical causes on literary revolutions, frequently neglect every thing that does not correspond with their particular system. “E-
 “ mulation,” says PATERCULUS (14), “ is
 “ the nurse of genius; sometimes envy,
 “ sometimes admiration, spurs us on, whilst
 “ that which is eagerly followed by all, na-
 “ turally arrives at perfection. How diffi-
 “ cult is it to stop at any height ! What-
 “ ever no longer advances, must inevitably
 “ retreat (15). As at first we glowed
 “ with the ambition of surpassing or equal-

(13) Réflex : sur la poësie. part 2. ubi supra.

(14) Hist. Rom. lib. 1. prope fin.

(15) Difficilisque imperfecto mora est, naturaliterque, quod procedere non potest, recedit.

“ling those we imagined our superiors, so
 “when our hopes are blasted our ardour
 “cools, and we give over the pursuit of
 “what we despair to overtake. Hence we
 “leave the beaten track for paths hitherto
 “unexplored, where novelty may raise
 “us from obscurity, and immortalise our
 “name.”

DURING and after the reign of TIBERIUS the itch of refinement in style increased to an immoderate degree both in prose and verse. Some even boasted that their periods were so smooth they might be sung and danced to (16). In fine, an universal affectation of conceit, and pomp of style, prevailed in every species of composition; and the ROMANS in general were already disgusted with the simplicity of the ancients.

(16) *Laudis & gloriæ & ingenii loco plerique jactant, cantari saltatique commentarios suos. Dial. de caus. corrup. eloq. p. 610.*

CALIGULA's resolution to destroy the works of VIRGIL and LIVY, the one for want of genius and learning, the other for coldness and negligence of style (17), has been generally numbered among the extravagances of that emperor. But were the matter maturely considered, it would appear, that this strange opinion was common to the literati of that age. Indeed the admirers of LUCAN, a poet replete with bombast, must necessarily condemn the natural simplicity of VIRGIL; nor is it surprising that LIVY should appear languid and negligent to the lovers of the rapidity, refinement, and conciseness of VELLEIUS PATERCULUS, though among the least faulty of his age. The notion, therefore, that the corruption of LATIN eloquence sprung from SENECA is rather universal than true. The falsity of it is plain even from his own works, in many places of which he men-

(17) Suet. in Calig. cap. 38.

tions writers who had deviated from the standard established in the age of CICERO; and he confirms the opinion that the ambition of a few to procure a name by an over-laboured style, was the only cause of this corruption. “The mind”, says he, “accustomed to despise what is usual, expects novelty even in common discourse.” It cannot, however, be denied, that this very SENECA was so far from endeavouring to bring back the ROMAN literati into the paths of taste, that he even accelerated its destruction. The beginning of PETRONIUS’s satire is thought to be levelled at him under the name of AGAMEMNON the Declaimer. It is certain, however, that SENECA was himself greatly infected with those very corruptions which he censured in others; as in like manner, Father DANIEL BARTOLI (18) of the last century, a man

(18) V. L’Huomo di lettere part. 2. verso il fine.

eminent in the republic of letters, unaccountably fell into those very points and conceits which he so deservedly and so successfully reprov'd in others. Yet SENECA was reckoned the principal literary genius of his age. All who aspired to a reputation for letters ranked themselves in the number of his followers. But none had that happy genius which rendered him, if not equal to the ancients, at least deserving of considerable praise among the moderns; for which reason none approached him in his good qualities, almost all exceeded him in his faults. QUINTILIAN's opinion of him is known to every one, therefore needless to be here repeated (19).

IX. It ought ever to be remembered to the honour of PHÆDRUS and CORNELIUS CELSUS, that they alone, amidst the general

(19) Instit. Orat. lib. x. cap. 1. circa finem.

depravity, preserved their taste uncorrupted. The latter compiled an useful treatise of physic in a chaste style, and suited to the subject, which he well knew could alone secure him a lasting reputation, without hunting after the ornaments used by other writers, who wanted to distinguish themselves from the ancients by refinement rather than by novelty of subject. Perhaps CELSUS, who was rather a man of letters than a physician, chose medicine, not from any particular inclination to the art, but because there was no other branch of learning untouched; and would have applied himself to compile from PLATO, XENOPHON, ARISTOTLE, or some other GREEK author, as he did from HIPPOCRATES, had he not been anticipated by former writers. PHÆDRUS, who wrote fables, a species of poetry which no ROMAN had hitherto attempted, was solicitous of no other ornament, but that elegant simplicity and

and purity of style which appear so conspicuous in his writings. Yet so uncommon was this natural elegance become, that the works of PHÆDRUS were scarce known; in so much that SENECA seems either not to have seen them, or if he had, that they had escaped his memory (21): for the literati of that age, despising simplicity and nature, esteemed only figurative, sententious, and in a word, false, and affected beauties.

(21) Non audeo te usque eo perducere, ut fabellas, Acropeos logos, *intentatum Romanis ingeniis opus*, solita tibi venustate connects. Sen. de consol. ad Polyb. cap. 27.

C H A P. III.

- I. *Revival of GREEK and LATIN literature under TRAJAN and the ANTONINI.* II. *Golden age of the Law.* III. *Why its professors excelled their contemporaries in style.* IV. *Golden age of letters among the CHRISTIAN fathers.* V. *The Barbarous, Arabick and Scholastic ages.* VI. *Scarcity of books and its effects.*

WHETHER the height of depravity paved the way for amendment, or the obstruction which the fine arts met with from the tyranny of NERO, and the civil wars of his successors, disposed mankind to resume their literary studies with redoubled vigour; certain it is, that in the reign of TRAJAN genius and taste again remarkably flourished. This reformation made its first appearance
under

under VESPASIAN, equally the encourager of learning and imposture; and continuing without any great lustre under TITUS and DOMITIAN, the patron of QUINTILIAN; that great restorer of taste, and immortal master of eloquence, attained great eminence under TRAJAN, the colleague and successor of NERVA. The style at this time, though scarce worthy of the CICERONIAN age, had, however, a very considerable degree of merit. The honours which TRAJAN conferred upon TACITUS, PLINY, PLUTARCH, and DION CHRYSOSTOM, and the disregard he expressed for JUVENAL and MARTIAL, authors rather ingenious and brilliant than judicious and useful, shew what an uncorrupted taste that great emperor possessed. If, in this age and that of the ANTONINI there appeared no orators or poets, to compare with CICERO and DEMOSTHENES, or even ASINIUS POLLIO, and LYSIAS, because poe-

tical subjects had already been exhausted, and a despotic government had choaked up the channels of popular declamation; yet there certainly were works which, at any period, may be read and studied with advantage. The heathen writers of those times, though many of them deeply tinctured with superstition and impiety, discovered a philosophical spirit, joined to an immense erudition, and exquisite delicacy of judgment. Of this the works of TACITUS, QUINTILIAN, PLUTARCH, LUCIAN, the younger PLINY, ATHENÆUS, AULUS GELLIUS, PAUSANIAS, DION CASSIUS, and LONGINUS are undeniable evidences. These authors, sometimes complain, indeed, of the corrupt style of their cotemporaries. But this was a misfortune common to the golden ages of ATHENS and ROME, and to every age in which letters have flourished; as the arts can never be ennobled by genius, if they are not like-

likewise debased by a crowd of shallow wittings, who, with all their efforts, will never rise above their original mediocrity.

I HAVE hitherto spoken of the belles-lettres only, which, though remarkably eminent under TRAJAN and the ANTONINI, were not the only study that rendered that a memorable period in the annals of learning. Although later experiments have brought the ancient practice into disrepute, yet GALEN is still esteemed by several of the most eminent physicians. (1) He was the author of many useful inventions; and if inferior to HIPPOCRATES in utility and judgment, was undoubtedly much more full and methodical: and M. de BUFFON (2) scruples not to prefer the Natural History of PLINY to the generality of our modern systems.

(1) Boerhaav. & Haller, in meth. stud. medic.

(2) Mémoire de traiter l'hist. natur. pag. 64.

II. BUT this period chiefly deserves immortality for the perfection which jurisprudence attained.

IN the infancy of the world, equity and natural reason supplied the place of law, and prevented its improvement to that degree of perfection it seemed to require. In those days the legislative branch seems to have been in higher honour than the judicial. The laws were not always agreeable to equity; and the law-givers, confining themselves to general cases, took little care to determine private controversies, upon which depend the quiet and security of individuals, which is the only bond of civil society, and the only intention of all legal authority. In GREECE, as well as the more ancient eastern nations, a sufficient sense of equity prevailed to distinguish between right and wrong in any difference. The AREOPAGUS of ATHENS has preserved a
venerable

venerable name in all ages and nations : yet except this general reputation it does not appear that, even in that court, they accustomed themselves to an accurate investigation of truth ; the judges being more remarkable for severity and integrity than learning and penetration. It was ROME that, by applying those seeds of jurisprudence, which she had received from GREECE, to particular cases, ennobled and enlarged this important science. The principal citizens publicly professed, in that capital of the world, to assist litigants not only in the courts of justice, but likewise in the drawing up of their writings. The custom, however, of pleading at the bar with pomp and energy of expression, and passionate declamation, often baffled reason, and rendered contemptible the more sterile and dry observers of the forms of law. The seditious conduct of the tribunes, and the diversity of the Prætorian edicts likewise

rendered jurisprudence in some degree disorderly. (1) But the first emperors, intent upon confirming despotism, endeavoured to new-model and regulate the law, and therefore, by dignities and honours, courted the favour and assistance of its professors. AUGUSTUS, VESPASIAN, and ADRIAN in particular, made many remarkable innovations; and afterwards under the ANTONINI it was more than ever established, regulated, and illustrated.

III. WITHOUT mentioning the laws enacted, renewed, or amended by the above emperors, I cannot help observing that about a century and a half after CICERO, the lawyers wrote purer LATIN than any other authors since the AUGUSTAN age. This will appear upon a comparison of JUSTI-

(1) V. Dion. Cass. lib. 36. Heinec. hist. jur. civ. lib. 1. cap. 3. paragr. 68.

NIAN's pandects, and the few remaining fragments of A. GELLIUS, with the law-writings of that father of ROMAN eloquence.

UPON due examination, far from seeming strange, this elegance will be found entirely agreeable to my position, that language is always best when ornaments are least affected, and figurative, or pointed expressions most studiously avoided; and that we are chiefly obnoxious to these false beauties, when literature has attained a certain degree of form and perfection. Now we must observe that though the civil law was cultivated among the ROMANS some centuries before the downfall of the republic, yet little or nothing was written upon that subject, the opinions of the lawyers being verbally delivered by way of private advice. MUTIUS SCÆVOLA and AQUILIUS GALLUS only
kept

kept minutes of the answers they gave their clients; and **SERVIUS SULPICIUS**, a cotemporary of **CICERO** (1), only collected a number of the written responses of his masters. They were besides, so unpolished, so undigested, so replete with the ancient forms, that **CICERO**, besides declaring on every occasion his contempt of them, and his sorrow for the disorder under which jurisprudence laboured in his time, wrote a book expressly to point out a method to reduce the civil law into an art. (2) **LABEO ANTISTHIUS**, **ATHEIUS CAPITO**, **ALFENUS VARUS**, **TREBATIUS TEOTA**, and **TUBERO**, the disciples of **SULPICIUS** in the reign of **AUGUSTUS**; **MASURIUS SABINUS**, in that of **TIBERIUS**; **SEMPRONIUS PROCULUS**, and **CASSIUS LONGINUS**, under **CLAUDIUS**, wrote, it is

(1) V. Heinecc. hist. jur. civ. lib. 1. cap. 3. paragr. 135. seq.

(2) A. Gell. lib. 1. cap. 22.

true, some pretty eminent works upon that science. (1) But their compositions were either tinged with the ancient inelegance, or had been rendered obsolete by the new institutions of the emperors; for the lawyers, who flourished under the ANTONINI, found, to their great happiness, a new and immense field to cultivate. Skilled in the LATIN language by the study of the ancients, and impressed with the importance of the subject, which rejected all superfluous graces, they were enabled to write with dignity and purity, upwards of a century after every other species of composition had fallen into numberless corruptions: so true is it, that any writer who thoroughly understands his subject, and labours not under a poverty of expression, will please the more, the less he endeavours to refine his

(1) V. Cl. Brunf. Diff. 4. in jus civile.

style with new expressions and far-fetched ornaments. Add to this, that as they expounded the laws with a due regard to the new government and constitution of the empire, their works became more generally useful than those of the ancients; and this, perhaps, may be the reason which induced TRIBONIANUS, in his compilation of the pandect, to prefer the more modern lawyers to those of the age of CICERO.

THE civilians of the second century merit the highest praise for having employed philosophy, not in the idle subtilties of metaphysics, but in regulating the actions of mankind, and determining the limits of MEUM and TUUM, those grand springs of action in the moral world. On the other hand, many philosophers, who lived at or soon after this time, as APULEIUS, PLOTINUS, PORPHYRY, and JAMBLICUS are no less blamable for
barely

barely repeating what had so often been said before, and for multiplying the useless refinements, whilst they neglected the noble grandeur, of PLATO, and the accurate solidity of ARISTOTLE.

THE literati, as LIBANIUS and AUSONIUS, who, under the protection of the emperor JULIAN, attempted to raise literature now almost sunk to the ground, resembled the ancient poets and orators in the same degree that JAMBLICUS, and PORPHYRY resembled PLATO and ARISTOTLE.

IV. CERTAIN it is, however, that LIBANIUS (the master of BASIL and CHRYSOSTOME) and the heathen philosophers of this period, contributed not a little to hasten the perfection which christian literature soon after attained, by exciting ecclesiastics to a habit of study and composition. Thus every age, in which any spur is given to genius, either

either gives birth to, improves, or perfects some branch of knowledge.

THE age of THEODOSIUS then, in which the profane studies were not entirely neglected, since it gave birth to CLAUDIAN and MACROBIUS, is memorable chiefly for ecclesiastical writers. When it became necessary to confute the errors of the ARIANS, NESTORIANS, PELAGIANS, and other heretics of the the fourth century; and when the peace and protection which the church, by the favour of the emperors, then enjoyed, afforded an opportunity to dispute on the mysteries of religion with greater security, there appeared many learned as well as eloquent discourses upon every article of the christian system: and AMBROSE, AUGUSTINE, JEROME, GREGORY NAZIANZENE, BASIL, and CHYRSOSTOME have always been considered as the most illustrious fathers of the catholic

tholic faith, the most perfect models of christian eloquence. As the civilians under **TRAJAN** were the first literati of their age, and have become the guides of all succeeding lawyers, so the ecclesiastical writers under **THEODOSIUS**, not only displayed an immense fund of theological erudition, but were likewise the most elegant writers of **GREEK** and **LATIN** in the age they lived.

V. **THE** invasion of the barbarians, besides totally ruining the western, greatly weakened the power of the eastern empire, and brought destruction upon the arts and sciences. They soon revived, however, under **CHARLEMAGNE**, though still infinitely short of that vigour which they attained, not only under **AUGUSTUS**, but even under **TRAJAN** and the **ANTONINI**. Nor was ecclesiastical learning by any means so successfully cultivated as in the fourth and fifth

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centuries, though the study of rites and ceremonies was improved and reduced to a better form and order.

THE ARABS soon after over-run SPAIN, and with many idle, abstruse subtilties, with which they tainted the arts and sciences in EUROPE, introduced some things which were afterwards of the greatest use, especially to the mathematics. To them we are indebted for arithmetic; and algebra, if not invented, is justly supposed to have been at least restored and improved by them. But the EUROPEANS reaped little present advantage from the sciences which the ARABS introduced or revived in the West. The endless speculations and comments upon ARISTOTLE and his philosophy, which in these days of politeness and erudition are neglected or ridiculed, were in those of barbarism and ignorance universally renowned.

The

The fame of the learned ARABS, their writings, their erroneous tenets, which it became necessary to refute, were soon divulged over EUROPE; and probably gave rise to the SCHOLASTIC divinity.

THE primitive fathers wrote upon religious subjects, only as the necessity of disproving the errors of paganism and heresy required; and for many ages no writer attempted a complete theological system. This might be partly owing to the necessary avocations of the bishops and pastors, then the only teachers of christianity, which prevented them from properly digesting and elucidating all its parts, and obviating every difficulty that might occur. But after the institution of universities, the doctors in divinity, a degree frequently conferred independent of the pastoral charge, free from every other care, and hackneyed in the schools, (whence they were styled SCHOOL-

MEN)

MEN) found leisure to compile entire bodies of divinity. Some of these, as St. ANSELM and PETRUS LOMBARDUS, and afterwards St. BONAVENTURE and the celebrated St. THOMAS AQUINAS, besides combating the errors current at that time, have left us many useful books full of solid learning. But even in these, it must be confessed, by endeavouring to advance too far, many wandered from the right path. An incredible number of doctors applied themselves to write commentaries upon PETRUS LOMBARDUS's book of SENTENCES, and St. THOMAS's SUM ; which, with the various tenets of the schools, so debased that sacred study, that the more discerning, even before the general restoration of literature, as NICOLAUS CLEMANGIUS, LUDOVICUS VIVES and ERASMUS, universally condemned the intolerable subtilty and abstruseness which had crept into the writings of the divines.

VI. BUT

VI. BUT the circumstances of the times, which in a great measure deprived the literati of a possibility of success, were more deplorable than the depraved taste of the writers : since the greatest genius and imagination, unassisted by books, will only serve to render a performance insipid. The more such an author shall reason, and the more he shall write, the more will his sterility disgust ; in those sciences particularly which require a knowledge of antiquity. To discover therefore the cause of the universal ignorance of the people, and of the barbarism of the monks and clergy, the only pretenders to literature at this time, we need only reflect upon the amazing scarcity of books over all EUROPE.

THE GOTHs, VANDALS, LOMBARDS, and other barbarians of the North, who, from the fifth century, at different times, over-run ITALY, FRANCE, and SPAIN, destroying

destroying all that had once constituted the majesty and grandeur of the ROMAN empire, aimed their merciless fury chiefly at the libraries, which had been collected in the more polished ages, either in the houses of the great, or in the churches and monasteries. Ignorant of LATIN and GREEK, envying perhaps the unvanquished nations that glory, if they did not wilfully destroy, they certainly took not the least care to preserve, any compositions in these languages. In many provinces towards the end of the seventh century, scarce any books were to be found ; and even in the papal library at ROME there was hardly a sufficient number for the use of his holiness himself, as appears from the answer of Pope St. MARTIN (1) to St. AMANDUS bishop of MAESTRICHT, who had sent to him for some from the remotest parts of GERMANY.

(1) Tom. 15. concil. pag. 285. ed. Paris, 1641.

LUPUS abbot of FERVIERES (1) found it necessary to send two of his monks to Pope BENEDICT III. to beg a copy of CICERO de ORATORE, QUINTILIAN's institutions, and a few other books. ALBERT abbot of GEMBOURS (2), who with incredible diligence and immense expence had collected an hundred volumes on theological, and fifty on prophane subjects, thought he had formed a great library. In the time of St. GENNADIUS of ASTORGA, about the beginning of the tenth century, books had become so scarce in SPAIN, that one and the same copy of the bible, St. JEROME's epistles, and some volumes of rules, offices, and etymologies often served several different monasteries (3). And to complete the destruction of the few that remained, the

(1) Lup. Ep. apud Baron. ad an. 856. n. 8. 9. 10.

(2) Fleury hist. ecclesiast. lib. 58. cap. 52.

(3) Fleury hist. ecclesiast. lib. 54. cap. 54.

priests and monks, unprovided with parchment sufficient to contain the offices of the church, razed the original writing of every book of which they did not understand the language, or saw not the present utility, and substituted psalms, anthems, or prayers. I myself remember to have seen in a certain monastery some of these ancient collections of anthems, in which I could still trace the effaced characters.

IN those days, the collector of a few loose quotations on any subject soon became an author of eminence. What would now barely serve for a common-place book, was then a necessary and commendable work. Nay so inestimable were books in the eyes of their possessors, that though unintelligible to themselves they would hardly give permission to read or transcribe any part of them,
and,

and, lest they should be stolen, secured them with chains to their libraries.

EVEN LOMBARDUS and GRATIAN gained their great reputation, the former, merely by collecting the opinions of the fathers, as a guide in divinity, and the latter, the canons for the use of the bar. BURCARDUS bishop of WORMS, who was the friend of abbot ALBERT, and had free access to his library, thought he could not better improve this advantage, than by compiling that collection of canons which has rendered his name immortal. The reputation of BELLOVACENSIS, preceptor and librarian to St. LEWIS king of FRANCE must be ascribed to his MIRROR, which is little more than a compilation from the books which his royal master had collected with a care worthy of himself (1).

(1) V. Echard. Bibb. Domin. tom. 1. pag. 212, ed. Paris, 1719.

No wonder then that the SCHOOLMEN of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were so fertile in speculation, so barren in erudition; their knowledge of antiquity being in a manner confined to GRATIAN's collection, LOMBARDUS's book of sentences, and one or two of ARISTOTLE's works, introduced by the ARABS. Besides, this scarcity of books rendered the study of any science frequently dependent upon chance. The doctrine and method of ARISTOTLE, which made such alterations in the science of divinity, began to take root when his works had by some means been introduced into FRANCE (1): at which time many schools read St. AUSTIN's logic, not as superior to that of ARISTOTLE, but as it was not to be found. In a few years, the ROMAN code, which was found by chance in the ruins of AMALFI, gave rise to the study of law, and was soon

(1) V. Launoï de var. Aristot. fort, cap. 5.

diligently

diligently applied to, though from the universal barbarism of the times, rather oppressed by an infinity of explications, than illustrated by the care of its professors. Nay, DANTE, the father of ITALIAN poetry and literature, seems to have thought himself singularly indebted to chance for throwing in his way the *ÆNEID* of VIRGIL, which he adopted for his model (2).

(2) *Vagliami il lungo studio, e il grande amore*

Che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.

Inf. cap. 1.

C H A P. IV.

- I. *Origin of the ITALIAN language.* II. *Circumstances that favoured the progress of literature in ITALY, before the year 1300.* III. *Whether the PROVENÇAL writers were of service to the ITALIAN language.* IV. *The difficulty of introducing and establishing the vernacular tongue.* V. *The authors that overcame this difficulty.* VI. *Particular reflections upon DANTE'S comedy.* VII. *Upon PETRARCH'S lyric poems.* VIII. *Upon BOCCACE'S DECAMERON.* IX. *What retarded the progress of ITALIAN literature after PETRARCH and BOCCACE.* X. *The literati that flourished about the end of the fifteenth century.*

LANGUAGES, and indeed almost all sublunary affairs, were originally established by chance rather than design: and to chance
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the ITALIAN language, polished as it now is, certainly owes its perfection. I shall not consider whether it is merely a corruption of the LATIN tongue, or a composition of that and the jargon of the barbarians who overthrew the ROMAN empire. It might indeed be clearly shewn, had not the subject been already amply and very learnedly discussed (1), that the idiom of our language is almost entirely LATIN; and though it cannot be denied, that many barbarous and foreign expressions have crept in, yet I am well convinced, that a large volume might be written in good ITALIAN without admitting a single word or phrase, whose origin is not to be traced from ancient ROME: nay that the language at present written in ITALY, is the same that was used in FLORENCE and ROME, five or six centuries ago. The alte-

(1) V. Maffei nella Verona illustrata, e Muratori diss. 33, sopra le antichità Italiane.

rations are very inconsiderable, or such as every living language is liable to, since they neither change its nature nor character. The orthography and pronunciation may be said to constitute the whole difference. It is, necessary however, to point out the circumstances which paved the way to the progress of literature, after the year 1300.

II. The emperor FREDERICK II. and MANFREDI, his natural son, both kings of NAPLES, learned themselves, and encouragers of learning, united some shining virtues with the most enormous vices. Amid the numberless calamities which they brought upon ITALY, they conferred one advantage by kindling the first sparks of literature, which, twinkling through the darkness of the preceding ages, pointed out the road to perfection.

EVEN

EVEN in the other parts of EUROPE, some star propitious to the fine arts seems at this period to have arisen, but no where with such influence as in ITALY. In SPAIN, ENGLAND, and GERMANY, letters, if at all cultivated beyond the monastic precincts, were solely applied to the mysteries of the cabala, the subtilties of the peripatetics, and the visions of astrology and alchymy.

BUT in PROVENCE, which was then a pretty considerable state, literature, if not in reality more successful, has, however, been more universally famous. RAIMOND IV. of ARRAGON, Count of PROVENCE, equally renowned for his princely virtues and poetical taste (2), had rendered his court a new temple of the muses; and thither the

(2) V. Jean Nostradamus Vies des Poet. Proven. Gio. Villani lib. 6, cap. 92. C. Nostradamus Hist. de Proven. p. 3.

lovers of the belles-lettres flocked from every corner of EUROPE. This was the grand æra of romance and gallantry. CHARLES I. of ANJOU, his son-in-law and heir, who came into ITALY to the conquest of NAPLES, introduced a taste for the PROVENÇAL literature, particularly at FLORENCE, where he reigned many years, and where he ordered his successors to reside and keep their court.

III. SEVERAL ITALIAN writers have imagined that our language was formed, polished, and enriched from the PROVENÇAL then the most famous of EUROPE, by the residence of the princes of ANJOU in ITALY, and of the ROMAN court soon after in PROVENÇE. Far from improving, however, this, in my opinion, rather retarded its progress. Many words, generally imagined PROVENÇAL, are in reality LATIN,

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naturalised by the inhabitants of PROVENCE. Nay, so certain is it that our language could stand without foreign assistance, that many of the PROVENÇAL words, introduced about the year 1300, became quickly obsolete, whilst the style of those writers who either could not, or would not, introduce PROVENÇALISMS, is now esteemed elegant, as well as proper for imitation.

It is very probable, however, that the PROVENÇAL authors conducted, in other respects, to the progress of ITALIAN literature. It was their example which in a great measure served to convince other nations that the modern languages were as well adapted for composition as those of antiquity. Besides, a taste for romance and PROVENÇAL poetry being diffused over ITALY, where that language was perhaps as universally understood

as the FRENCH is at present, introduced, with an air of gallantry, a taste for reading, and, in many a desire of imitating the romance-writers of PROVENCE, by writing in a language intelligible to the ladies and the people.

THE times continued propitious to letters. Many ITALIANS, banished by faction, or prompted by gain, travelled from place to place, to repair their shattered fortunes; and thus acquired some branches of learning, or collected books, which in those days were extremely rare. After FREDERICK II. MANFREDI, and CHARLES I. the ITALIAN literature found an eminent patron in CANE DELLA SCALA. He was sovereign of VERONA and several other considerable cities; and is immortalised in the history of this period, as well as by the high encomiums
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of DANTE, who opportunely experienced his protection.

IV. AMID the multiplicity of languages, what chiefly embarrassed the writers of this age was a proper choice. If chance did not direct them, may we not conclude, that it was the best which that at last prevailed, and overcame all opposition? The number of independent states forbid all hopes of a common dialect, at least so long as the custom continued of writing the public acts, and reading lectures to youth, in LATIN, and that the most barbarous and irregular. They never dreamt that a work in their provincial dialect would be read over all ITALY, or handed down to posterity. BRUNETTO LATINI, as JOHN VILLANI informs us, was the first who attempted to polish the FLORENTINES by improving their taste

taste and style ; yet he thought proper to write his great work the TESORO in the PROVENÇAL language. If this did not proceed from resentment of his banishment, it must be confessed that, with all his erudition, he wanted the delicate discernment of PETRARCH. This great poet, though he resided at AVIGNON, where the Pope kept his court, and was enamoured of a PROVENÇAL lady wisely preferred the ITALIAN to the other, though at that time esteemed the most beautiful and noble of the EUROPEAN languages. In reality, however, it was by no means superior to the language of ROME and FLORENCE ; nor had they greater reason to prefer the one to the other, than we should now have to prefer the VENETIAN or PIEDMONTESE to the FLORENTINE.

V. DANTE, the disciple of BRUNETTO LATINI, originally designed that his poem

should

should appear in LATIN (1), as well as his treatise upon monarchy. Desirous, however, of instilling into the laity, then a synonymous term for the illiterate, his strokes of satire and political maxims, he altered his intention, and published it in Italian. His predecessors or cotemporaries, though they did not write much, generally wrote in LATIN. The few pieces in the vulgar language which have survived, and are mentioned in our dictionaries, seem to have been intended solely for the use of themselves, and their fellow-citizens; being for the most part translations, sermons, or trifles till then hardly thought worthy of the public eye. PASSAVANTI, indeed, a great theologian of that time, has left us an ITALIAN work entitled, *The MIRROR OF TRUE REPENTANCE*. But even that was originally LATIN,

(1) Benvenuto da Imola Comento sopra l'Inferno, Cant. 1.
e Boccac, nella vita di Dante,

and only a part afterwards translated into ITALIAN for the benefit of the illiterate, and at the desire of some of his penitents (1). If narrowly examined, the chronicles of VILLANI will likewise appear to have been intended for the FLORENTINES alone ; that is, to record, in imitation of the annals of ancient ROME, the transactions of that particular state, and therefore with peculiar propriety written in the native language. But, on the other hand, all PETRARCH's works were LATIN, all at least from which he expected any honour. His lyric poems were composed, as every body knows, for his mistress, or for the amusement of his friends and acquaintance. Were there no other proof of this, the poem, " S'io avessi pensato che sì care," would sufficiently evince it. BOCCACE wrote in LATIN his learned

(1) Passavanti pag. 95. c. 203. edit, Milan.

work of the genealogy of the gods. His ITALIAN pieces, as the AMETTO, the FILOCOLO, and the FIAMMETTA, being turgid and obscure, it is probable he did not expect any reputation from them, if unembellished with poetic ornaments. His novels, which were written merely to entertain the ladies, he thought unworthy of being classed among his literary works, and deserving of no esteem, as appears from his preface to the FOURTH DAY.

I HAVE dwelt rather long upon this head, as I think it observable that whilst the ITALIAN literature began to make its first advances, those very authors who, by their ingenious writings in their native language, were found to have been its first promoters, by the neglect of those writings, seem likewise to have been the great obstacles to its farther progress. Had PETRARCH, for instance,

stance, written in ITALIAN his AFRICA, his eclogues, and his prose-writings, with the same elegance as his lyrics, letters would probably have arrived at perfection in the sixteenth century sooner, or at least with less difficulty. Contrary to their expectation, we now behold in three works, one intended to gratify personal-resentment, another to indulge an amorous inclination, and the third merely for female-amusement, the founders of a language, now so noble and universal, and after having in vain endeavoured to acquire reputation by their LATIN, undesignedly, as it were, immortalised by their ITALIAN compositions.

VI. SOME may perhaps think this injurious to these three authors, as well as to the rise of ITALIAN literature, of which they are confessedly the fathers. I flatter myself,

myself, however, that an impartial enquiry will shew great probability, if not the certainty of my observation. Men incline rather to vice and licentiousness, than to the severity of virtue; and for this reason, perhaps, DANTE'S comedy, PETRARCH'S lyrics, and BOCCACE'S whole works have been generally read for their blemishes—their scandal, obscenity, and indecent descriptions. Meanwhile the people accustomed to books in their native tongue, began to ridicule or neglect all who still preferred those of antiquity; and the learned, if desirous of applause, found themselves at length obliged to adapt their language to their readers. Every thing concurred still more to favour its progress when the literati found in the above authors or blended with these defects, an inexhaustible fund of all the beauties requisite to form a perfect work.

WE must not take our idea of the success of DANTE's comedy in those times from the opinion which many now entertain of it. The melancholy air that breathes through the whole, nay the very design of bringing hell and purgatory, as it were, upon the stage; which to our delicate critics appears so foreign to the nature of poetry, was certainly of all others the best adapted to the circumstances, and genius of the age. The valour and amours of the knight-errants, that eternal subject of romance would not have been so pleasing to the ITALIANS of those days, harrassed as they constantly were by the civil wars between the GUELPHS and GIBELINES, the WHITES and BLACKS, and on all hands surrounded by a superstitious partiality in favour of one or the other party. A remarkable event, recorded by JOHN VILLANI (1), shews the

(1) Lib. 8. cap. 70.

predominant passion of the times for such supernatural extravagances. In the year 1304, when Cardinal DA PRATO was legate at FLORENCE, among the other entertainments exhibited as a mark of the public joy, the inhabitants of ST. PRIANO gave public notice, that all who wanted to hear news from the other world should repair to the banks of the ARNO on the first of May. Accordingly a scaffold was erected upon boats and a representation given of hell, in which were introduced human figures, dressed up like devils and damned souls, agonizing in flames and other tortures. This drew a multitude of spectators; and to conclude the story, which is rather unconnected with our subject, when the shew was nearly over, the scaffold fell, and many paid for their curiosity with their lives. From this spectacle DANTE possibly formed the design of his comedy, as MILTON it is said
of

of his PARADISE LOST, from seeing ANDREINO's fall of ADAM represented at MILAN; in which God the father, angels, devils, the serpent, death, and the seven mortal sins were brought upon the stage.

THE following story from BOCCACE will farther evince the amazing credulity of the vulgar as to intelligence from the other world, and the rapid dispersion of DANTE's poem over Italy. Whilst that poet, in his banishment from FLORENCE, resided at VERONA, he one day, with a few friends, passed a door, at which several ladies were sitting; one of them whispered the rest. "O there goes DANTE who travels to hell, and returns when he pleases, fraught with tidings from below." "True," adds another, "and don't you likewise observe his crisp beard, and complexion browned by the infernal heat and smoke"? The poet, who

who overheard the conversation, continued his way laughing with his companions at their simplicity

THAT universal desire of knowing the condition of persons lately dead, and still famous, induced every one to read DANTE's poem, to keep it in their memory, and cite it in their works; even JOHN and PHILIP VILLANI, who seldom or never introduce any other author, often give us verses from DANTE.

HIS style, though now rather obsolete, was then, as we are assured by VILLANI and BOCCACE, authors of undoubted authority, the most elegant of any in the ITALIAN language. Amid all the gloom of his subject, and the obscurity of his expression, we still find such a luxuriance of poetic imagery, such a fund of the sublime and beautiful,

tiful, such a display of learning and knowledge of mankind, that, since HOMER, we may safely affirm there has been no poet more original than DANTE, or of a more lively and just imagination. But what in my opinion, greatly enhances the merit of this poet, is his imitation of the ÆNEID in so singular a manner, that he has left the field open to others to follow HOMER, VIRGIL, or himself, without the miserable necessity of treading in his footsteps, or deviating into wrong paths to avoid the appearance of servility.

VII. ON the other hand, so correct is the diction of PETRARCH's sonnets, that in the space of four hundred years, these pieces have never been taxed with the smallest inaccuracy, nor can they while the ITALIAN language retains its purity. Nay, so justly has he been accounted the infallible standard of our style, that

that there is perhaps no author of any nation, whose expressions may be so freely adopted in prose or verse as those of PETRARCH; though he flourished so long ago, and the language, as a living one, has been always subject to change. But, besides this excellence, PETRARCH has entirely exhausted that species of poetry which he cultivated. His principal subject is PLATONIC love, in which the affections of the heart have a greater share than the pleasures of sense. Upon this he composed about three hundred little poems, in which he has happily united the majesty of the ode with the tenderness of the elegy, and charms us with novelty in every line. I want powers to express with what copiousness, spirit, and delicacy he has described the passion of love, not only free from the smallest tincture of licentiousness and obscenity, but seasoned with moral sentiments equally refined and

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unaffected,

unaffected. It is not, therefore, to be wondered that so few of the many ingenious men who have since attempted to imitate PETRARCH have acquired a reputation in any degree comparable to his.

BOCCACE'S DECAMERON is by no means entitled to such ample praise. Not to mention the impiety and obscenity, with which it remarkably abounds, the style must be sparingly imitated. Obsolete words appear almost in every line; and were we to peruse BOCCACE without a previous acquaintance with the classical authors of later ages, we should inevitably fall into expressions, which would greatly impair the beauty of our language. There is another particularity in his style much more worthy of observation, as it perhaps occasioned, in the sixteenth century, a corruption universally fatal to the ITALIAN literature, from which, to
this

this day, it has hardly emerged. His affectation of the LATIN construction, by throwing the principal verb to the end of the sentence, and other singularities of that kind, made many believe them peculiar to the ITALIAN language; though PASSAVANTI, VILLANI, and DINO COMPAGNI contemporaries of DANTE, and esteemed excellent writers, might have convinced them of the contrary. But the faults of eminence are always fatal. The perfections of BOCCACE gave a sanction to his most pernicious errors; to those at least which had the smallest semblance of propriety.

BE that as it may, the DECAMERON has, upon the whole, much more literary merit than any other ITALIAN composition. Some there are more elegant and correct, others more learned in appearance, if not in reality; but without reading this, none

none can know the true force of our language, or indeed can be said to have read an ITALIAN performance possessed of true spirit, or lively, nervous elocution. Besides, the striking characters of persons of every rank, and stories proper to enrich the fancy of the comic as well as tragic and epic poet, render it of the highest utility. Beautiful as well as just sentiments occur at every turn. In every subject, the dignity of the author appears. But above all, the DECAMERON is valuable, as a masterly picture of the manners of the age; not only in general of the various conditions of life, but in particular of the most illustrious personages of that and the preceding century.

IX. NOT to mention the other writers of this period, who have left us elegant ITALIAN histories, discourses of morality and religion, or translations of the ancients; 'tis evident

evident that the above three only ought to have been of great service to letters, by stimulating the ingenious to cultivate their native tongue. This effect, however, did not so soon follow. The evils which, at this time, harrassed ITALY, precluded all application to the arts of peace. The free states were miserably distracted by intestine wars, the others oppressed by usurpers, and avaricious, brutal tyrants, and all infested by bands of armed ruffians who proscribed equally princes and people, and spread terror through every corner of ITALY. NAPLES was distressed by the caprice of JEAN II. and afterwards by the obstinate wars between the houses of ANJOU and ARRAGON. The papal territories were torn in pieces by the avarice and ambition of the vassals of the church, who usurped a despotic authority in their respective fiefs. The pope himself was insolently trampled under foot by the Ro-

MANs, whilst the most inflexible schisms, and an invidious denial of the pontifical authority dissolved the unity of the church, and the apostolic see.

X. THESE contests, however, disposed men to the study of the canon law. In the councils of PISA, CONSTANCE, BASIL, and FLORENCE, there appeared some ecclesiastics of great renown, as PETER d'AILLI and chancellor GERSON. Some of these seem to have been likewise versed in the belles-lettres, as NICOLAUS CLEMANGIUS, who has left a work very elegantly written in LATIN for the time in which he lived. Towards the end of this century, the famous LAURENTIUS VALLA, MARCILIUS FICINUS, POLITIAN, GIANANTONIO CAMPANO, and PLATINA flourished in ITALY a little before the great ERASMUS and LUDOVICUS VIVES, the two principal restorers of literature and taste.

C H A P.

CHAP. V.

- I. *Favorable conjunctures about the year 1500.*
- II. *Of the GREEK literati, and the books which they brought with them into ITALY after the sack of CONSTANTINOPLE.*
- III. *Great improvement of the ITALIANS in LATIN literature.*
- IV. *Progress of ITALIAN literature—what branches of it were cultivated with most success.*
- V. *Of epic poetry—who were particularly eminent in it, and why.*
- VI. *Lyric, pastoral, humorous, satiric, and didactic poetry.*
- VII. *Tragedy and comedy in the sixteenth century.*
- VIII. *Digression on the modern drama.*
- IX. *General reflections upon the obstacles to a farther improvement of dramatic composition in ITALY.*
- X. *Eloquence of the bar.*
- XI. *Various circumstances which retarded the advance of sacred eloquence.*
- XII. *Historians of the sixteenth century.*

XIII. *Philosophers, moralists, and critics.*

XIV. *Observations upon dialogue, a method of writing generally used in that age.*

XV. *Of the translations from the ancients.*

IN the mean time, the ambition of ALEXANDER VI. and of CÆSAR BORGIA, his son, and the fierce, untractable spirit of JULIUS the second, altered, and in a great measure established, the state of ITALY: a remarkable instance that the greatest vices are sometimes employed by providence to effect the most salutary revolutions. ALEXANDER the sixth was perhaps the most unworthy pontiff that ever filled the see of St. PETER; his son duke VALENTINE, the most abandoned prince in ITALY. These two, intent upon forming ROMANIA into a sovereignty hereditary in their own family, under cover of the papal authority, exterminated those tyrants who, with the title of vicars,

vicars, had usurped the lands of the church. But the unexpected death of ALEXANDER put an end to the designs of VALENTINE. JULIUS, who with the name and authority of a priest, was animated with the soul of the most intrepid hero, converted the designs of BORGIA to the establishment of the temporal dominion of the Pope. Thus began the law of nations gradually to spring up in ITALY, which, for some ages, had in a manner totally disappeared in EUROPE. As political authority gained ground, individuals became more secure, and turned their attention to the peaceful study of letters; the succeeding wars in ITALY, those for instance betwixt the FRENCH and SPANIARDS, being widely different from the former convulsions, in which city fought with city, friend with friend.

Now it was that the ITALIAN princes and nobles began to take pleasure in the fine arts, and to patronise genius. The houses of MEDICIS and MONTEFELTRO were the first which set the glorious example. Above all, LEO the tenth, who prompted by the example of his relations to encourage letters, found in the treasures which JULIUS the second had amassed, and in the revenues of the apostolic see which he had augmented, riches sufficient to gratify, even in this, his magnificent and liberal disposition.

II. AT this time two other circumstances conduced to accelerate in ITALY, and other places, the progress of literature. The art of printing was invented, which introduced a great, perhaps excessive, facility of preserving books, and multiplying copies of them. The GREEK literati, escaping from the destruction of their country, then conquered

quered by the TURKS, found an honourable
 asylum in the courts of the ITALIAN princes,
 and greatly promoted the polite arts by their
 learning, and the books which they brought
 with them. Learning both sacred and pro-
 fane had, it is true, suffered some dreadful
 shocks at CONSTANTINOPLE from the fury
 of the ICONOCLASTS : and LEO ISAURICUS,
 a most ignorant prince, and merciless foe to
 letters, had burnt the imperial library, which
 contained thirty thousand volumes. Many
 books, however, escaped the flames ; and
 from time to time great men arose, who
 maintained a spirit of literature in the east.
 The GREEK language, though degenerated
 from its former elegance in the mouths of
 the vulgar, and even in the writings of the
 learned, continued infinitely more pure than
 the LATIN in the west. How great the dif-
 ference betwixt the LATIN of St. BONA-
 VENTURE, St. THOMAS, or any other of that

age, and the GREEK of PHOTIUS, EUSTACHIUS, MICHAEL PSELLUS, XIPHILINUS, SUIDAS, or the princess ANNA COMNENA ! These not only shew the industry even of modern GREECE, but the number of books that still remained ; since those alone which PHOTIUS read, and from which he compiled, were six or seven times more numerous than the greatest libraries that could be collected in the west. He and SUIDAS introduced those two species of composition, now so common, lexicons and historical dictionaries ; which as well as compends, like that of XIPHILINUS, though occasionally necessary, generally indicate a decline of literature. Even so early as the age of CHARLEMAGNE, a great number of books, especially those of the GREEK fathers, were sent for to CONSTANTINOPLE ; and during the Croisades, and the government of the LATIN princes of GREECE, it is probable that some of the

croisés

croisés brought back a few volumes into their native country. But upon the invasion of the TURKS towards the end of the fifteenth century, the learned GREEKS endeavoured to secure a better reception in ITALY by those books which they had preserved from the fury of their conquerors.

III. LITERATURE had already begun to flourish in ITALY before this period, though we are certainly not a little indebted to the GREEKS for its farther progress. To them we are principally obliged for the LATIN translations which then appeared in ITALY of almost all the GREEK classics; and not only ITALY, but all the nations of EUROPE, have considered JOHN, ANDREW, and CONSTANTINE LASCARIS as the principal restorers of taste. In those days the universal study of the ITALIANS was to write LATIN. POLITIAN, and soon after him FLAMINIO

FLAMINIO FRACASTORO, JEROM VIDA, bishop of ALBA, NAUGERIO, and SANAZZARO, aspired to imitate VIRGIL, CATULLUS, HORACE, and TIBULLUS: and although their attempts were successful, and greatly conducive to the restoration of LATIN elegance, they are now read by pedagogues and a few LATIN versifiers alone. Such likewise has been the fate of the LATIN works of BEMBO, CASA, and MANUZIO; the last of whom, together with SIGONIO, RODIGINO, PANVINIO, and ANTONIO ACOSTINO, merit the highest applause, not only for their elegant style, but for their deep researches into the most hidden antiquities sacred and profane.

IV. MEANWHILE the culture of ITALIAN literature, which, for one hundred and fifty years after PETRARCH, had been greatly neglected, again began to flourish. The diligence

gence and example of the great BEMBO, who lived in the beginning of that century, greatly forwarded its restoration, and ARIOSTO'S ORLANDO FURIOSO marked the glorious epocha. Were we to judge from the genius, diligence, and number of the literati and their princely protectors, we should readily allow that every branch of the belles-lettres was then carried to the summit of perfection. But how paradoxical will it appear that this pretended golden age has produced only three or four authors now worthy of imitation, though the genius of the language is still the same, and the ITALIANS were ever undeniably possessed of a fertile imagination! To discuss this question fully would require volumes. It may be proper, however, to mention the principal causes of this apparent contradiction; and to point out what studies were successfully

fully cultivated, what little attended to, by the ITALIANS of the sixteenth century.

UPWARDS of twelve epic poems and romances appeared, all written with elegance and purity. But the epic poets after ARIOSTO gave too great a loose to their fancy, from a blind admiration of that great master's errors. We have indeed no reason to believe that in fancy BERNARDO TASSO, LUIGI ALAMANNI, TRISSINO, or CHIABRERA are superior, or even equal to him, or that their style and versification are more pure. But if this were so, the epopee was already so much exhausted that little was left but to copy the verses of ARIOSTO, or by altering debase them. Nay, perhaps he might himself have shared the same fate, had BOIARDO lived to finish and revise his ORLANDO INAMORATO. TRISSINO, and TORQUATO TASSO, from the nature of
their

their subjects might have surpassed ARIOSTO as epic poets, the ORLANDO FURIOSO having the parts without the body of an heroic poem. But the former failed from a too servile imitation of HOMER, and the languid looseness of his verses; and TASSO, superior to them all in the texture of his poem, in force, dignity, and grandeur of expression, unfortunately adopted, to excess, the use of figures.

VI. THE lyric poets are still more numerous; but of the infinity of sonnets, canzonets, and other elegant little pieces which they composed, if few are now worthy of attention, we may blame their indiscreet attachment to PETRARCH, and the universal gallantry of the age. Every one sung his amours; but as their master had, in a great measure, exhausted that subject, and adorned it with all the graces of poetry,
and

and purity of style; it is not difficult to conjecture why his followers in the sixteenth century were so unsuccessful. Yet there are some who have left us lyric poems on other subjects fraught with elegance, with spirit and with dignity. Of these the most celebrated are Cardinal BEMBO, Signor DELLA CASA, Signor GUIDICIONE, ANGELO DA COSTANZA, and MOLZA.

No poet of any repute applied himself to fable, if we except FIRENZUOLA, whose elegant DISCORSI DEGLI ANIMALI in prose may perhaps deserve that name. But the pastoral, not to mention the PASTOR FIDO of GUARINI, or the AMINTA of TASSO, received all the lustre of which it is capable from the ARCADIA of SANNAZZARO: and MOLZA's NINFA TIBERINA may rank with the most admired eclogues in any language.

THE humorous poems of this age would have done singular honour to ITALY, but for their general obscenity and licentiousness. We have this comfort, however, that the ENGLISH and FRENCH, who from CHAUCER and MAROT have cultivated this species of poetry, were in grace and nature greatly inferior to the ITALIANS, in impudence and impiety equal, if not superior, to them.

THE *Capitole Burleschi*, one of its branches, is a species of true satire, and approaches the manner of HORACE perhaps nearer than any other. But though the satires of ARIOSTO, the works of LUIGI ALAMANNI, the *GIORNATE* of TORQUATO TASSO, and a few others, were wrote with elegance and spirit, yet in satiric or didactic poetry, neither the age of LEO X. nor indeed the two following ages, have produced any thing equal to the works of HORACE,

BOILEAU,

BOILEAU, RACINE or POPE; and if this inferiority is not to be imputed to our confined *terze rime*, we must confess that the ITALIANS of this period were devoid of that accuracy and precision which we find in foreigners, and in many of our more modern poets.

VII. WHEN we consider the flourishing state of poetry in many provinces of ITALY, and the protection it enjoyed from so many princes; it is strange that dramatic composition, particularly tragedy, the noblest province of the muses, should remain in such neglect, that not above four or five were written in the whole course of this century; though TRISSINO had so opportunely paved the way by his SOPHONISBA, the first regular tragedy which appeared in EUROPE from the decline of ROMAN letters.

I MIGHT,

I MIGHT with some appearance of probability affirm, that the political condition of ITALY was far from being favourable to tragic genius. SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, those brilliant luminaries of tragedy, flourished in the zenith of ATHENIAN liberty; and the pleasure which the people took in the overthrow of kings and tyrants, though in fiction, was the strongest inducement to cultivate this species of poetry. The states of ITALY, on the other hand, were now sunk into the most abject imbecility; and those who were possessed of the government, whether justly or unjustly, could not be supposed to tolerate, much less encourage, public exhibitions of the characters of usurpers, or the vices of princes. Even VENICE and NAPLES, the one firmly established in liberty, the other in slavery, will appear to have been by no means exempted from the same obstacles. The fate

of ITALY was too near a crisis, the limits of the jurisdictions, into which she is still divided, too undetermined, to afford any scope for tragedy. But even in these days, we are far inferior to the FRENCH and other nations in tragedy: we must therefore seek for other causes why ITALY has been hitherto destitute of her CORNEILLE and her RACINE.

VIII. A GENIUS capable of perfecting one epic poem, or ten or twelve good tragedies is certainly rare. A populous and civilised nation, however, may in the space of a century produce many such; and a true poet may with ease compose one heroic poem, or a few tragedies, for his amusement, as RUCCELLAI, CONTI, and MAFFEI did; but before the tragic drama can be firmly established it is absolutely necessary that a theatre should be open to represent them, and that
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the love of applause or gain should animate and support the poet. This it is which cramps the progress of ITALIAN tragedy.

OUR comedies are much more numerous, though inferior, for the same reason, to those of other nations. In the sixteenth century the field lay more open for comedy than tragedy. Those dastardly, sensual princes, such as LEWIS FARNESE, duke of PARMA; and ALEXANDER de MEDICIS, duke of FLORENCE, who would have detested tragedy, delighted in pastime; and comedies were, of course, performed in almost all the courts and cities of ITALY. This gave the wits of the age an opportunity to exercise their talents; and we have a few of SALVIATI, CARO and ARIOSTO, two of the famous MACHIAVEL, besides those of LASCA and CECCHI, which were composed for the FLORENTINE theatre. But the nar-

row boundaries of a city or a province, the fashion of a day, can never animate men of superior genius to devote themselves wholly to the drama. ITALY, which is said to be the country of comedians and mountebanks, would not have had, even now perhaps, a stock of tolerable comedies, had not GOLDONI, endued with an excellent comic genius, and inferior to MOLIERE only in versification and purity of language, by strolling over ITALY, in quest of applause and a subsistence, established a regular, though itinerant, company of performers. Thus did one man in a great measure repair, by his profession, the disadvantages under which our theatre laboured from the political state of ITALY.

IX. BUT why was not this effected with equal success in tragedy? GOLDONI and the abbot CHIARI had written comedies, why
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did not other poets write tragedies for the same actors? The remark is just; and this, it must be confessed, would certainly have roused the tragic muse. But ITALIAN literature has not yet obtained so great benefit from the stage, and I am afraid never will. Our theatre, long accustomed to masks and farces, was at length completely corrupted last century by the introduction of tragic-comedy from SPAIN. Magical feats, forcery, indeed every thing strange, ominous and incredible, became the chief business of comedy; whilst the underplot consisted of love-stories equally tedious and insipid. In tragedy, the most awful, the most pathetic subjects were interlarded with the lowest buffoonery. The people, accustomed to this, were satisfied. The comedians, freed from the trouble of studying new parts, the plot being universally the same, found it convenient; and as they spoke extempore,

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were sure of applause, when they delivered any thing smart or witty. We may judge then if such a company would chuse to introduce a regular tragedy, much less purchase one, at the expence of perhaps an hundred crowns, and renounce their random representations. Besides, it is well known what difficulties GOLDINI had to encounter before he could bring the people to a proper relish for comedy, though it does not require such great abilities or attention in the actors or spectators as tragedy. Till some great prince shall establish a theatre in his capital, give orders, for a certain time at least, that none but regular pieces written with elegance, be presented, and reward poets and actors according to their merit, ITALY can never hope to equal the drama of other nations.

WERE

WERE this accomplished, there is reason to believe that we should surpass the moderns in tragic as well as epic composition. Nay, our hendecasyllabic verse is perhaps better adapted to this than any other style. The *MEROPE* of *MAFFEI*, the *CÆSAR* of *CONTI*, and several other tragedies of this century; but, above all, the example of father *GRANELLI*, leave not the smallest doubt of success, when proper opportunity and encouragement shall appear. The Jesuits, in their colleges for the education of youth in *ITALY*, have a custom of performing tragedies for the exercise and entertainment of their pupils. Many fathers by composing pieces for these private exhibitions, have in some measure remedied the deficiency I complain of. *GRANELLI*, betwixt the years 1729, and 1732, when very young, and but a student of divinity, wrote three tragedies, undoubtedly among the best in our language; though he was de-

barred by the rules of the society from an introduction of female characters. What might he not have done, what might he not still do, had he not these thirty years relinquished poetry for the more pious office of the priesthood.

I WOULD here enlarge upon the opera, that degenerate species of tragedy, in which ITALY has infinitely surpassed every other nation; but as APOSTOLO ZENO and METASTASIO, who have carried it to so great perfection, both flourished in the present century, I should deviate too far from the period to which I have limited this chapter.

X. To descend from poetry, let us now examine what other branches of literature have been successfully cultivated, what neglected, in the sixteenth century, and consider
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the causes of this difference. Eloquence, we find, was either entirely abandoned or immersed in the barbarous abuses of the schools. Our young literati, who have perhaps heard of the applauses given to ALBERTUS LOLLIUS and JOHN DELLA CASA, will perhaps be offended when I assert that oratory received no lustre in the sixteenth century, or at least, that no ITALIAN has left any elegant models either for the pulpit or the bar. CASA indeed composed two or three orations fraught with all the pomp and dignity of the most noble elocution; but as he wrote, for the most part, merely to exercise his rhetorical talents, their intrinsic value and force are impaired by an evidently declamatory style. The same observation will apply to ALBERTUS LOLLIUS, whose subjects are generally trite, and appear to have been intended rather for the school than for the senate. But the literati are not

chiefly to blame for this inferiority of ITALIAN eloquence to that of ancient ATHENS or ROME. To investigate the true causes of it we must consider the nature of our governments, and the prevailing customs of the age. Throughout ITALY, if we except VENICE, there was not perhaps one regular assembly, which could give an ingenious, patriotic citizen occasion to display his eloquence. In the despotic governments, affairs of state were adjusted in the cabinet or by the pleasure of the prince. The republics were exposed to almost daily revolutions; and seldom did the system of administration continue a whole year the same. Thus the opportunities of publicly addressing the people were altogether transitory; and could afford no scope for studied harangues, as was the custom in ATHENS and ROME, without which true eloquence is not to be attained. We have a striking example of this in VE-

NICE,

NICE, where the civil government having been long firmly established, the general taste for letters which arose at this time, naturally produced some great orators. Of these was BODOARO; and if CASA ever applied his oratory to real use, it must have been during his nunciature at that republic.

IF, however, the practice of regulating national affairs in the cabinet of the prince precluded all public declamation, it gave rise to a number of accomplished secretaries, who have left copious and valuable collections of letters; valuable for the historical knowledge they contain, valuable as inimitable models of the epistolary style.

XI. IT may appear extraordinary that sacred eloquence, which never wanted opportunities to display itself, should make such small progress. Even the sermons of Je-

ROM MUSSO, bishop of BITONTO, whose reputation for eloquence was so high that he was appointed to preach at the opening of the council of TRENT, if we except a few happy strokes, are but pompous harangues, interlarded with scriptural expressions introduced at random. Those of cardinal SERIPANDO, and GABRIEL FIAMMA, are neither more masterly nor more persuasive. The latter wrote six discourses on the ANUNCIATION of the VIRGIN, which shew what notions they had of panegyric in those days. Yet, as FONTANI assures us, these three were the best sacred orators of the sixteenth century. It is easy, however, to account for this defect of the eloquence of the pulpit, notwithstanding its intimate connection with the belles-lettres. Almost all the ecclesiastics, the men of letters at least, were retainers of the court. Few bishops of reputation resided upon their dioceses, fewer
still

still ever thought of preaching, or writing upon sacred subjects. BEMBO, SADOLETO, CASA, VIDA, CARO, indeed almost all resigned the pulpit to the MENDICANTS; insomuch that the words FRIAR and PREACHER became almost synonymous. The many learned religious that have flourished since the institution of the new, and reformation of the old orders, will not, I hope, be offended if I affirm, as with too great truth I can, that two centuries ago, if a monk wrote with the smallest spirit of literature, or taste, he was pointed out and extolled as a prodigy. If we add to this, that the study of the fathers, and of ecclesiastical history, which ought to constitute the sinews of the pulpit, was abstruse and intricate; we shall no longer be surprised that priests, nursed in the thorny barbarism of scholastic speculation, succeeded so poorly in this species of eloquence, which ought to

be clear, simple, popular, and as much as possible polished, insinuating, and affecting.

IT is evident that BERNARDINO DA SIENA, one of the most eminent preachers of his age, did not relinquish so much as he ought those logical distinctions and terms which render his sermons dry and disagreeable, replete as they are with sound doctrine, and lively pictures of the times. In spite of all this, excellent orators might perhaps have arisen among the monks, had not the circumstances of the times proved unfavourable.

FROM the sermons and other works of SAVONAROLA, and BERNARDINO OCHINO DA SIENA, and from the testimonies of their cotemporaries, we may conceive what perfection sacred eloquence would have attained
but

but for the unhappy fate of both these orators. SAVONAROLA, it is true, was too fond of mingling politics with religion, and perhaps it was this alone which involved him in ruin. But if in the public assemblies of a city like FLORENCE, he could sway at will the minds of citizens the most eminent in ITALY for genius and understanding, what must he have done, skilled as he was in divinity, thundering from the pulpit with the gospel in his hands? What must his followers have done, had they been able properly to imitate so illustrious a model, and to employ the sciences, which were then hastening to perfection, in avoiding his blemishes, and improving his beauties?

I HAVE never had an opportunity to peruse the discourses or any other of the works of BERNARDINO OCHINO, that celebrated capuchin, who from being general of his

order, fled into SWITZERLAND, and became pastor of a LUTHERAN church. The testimony, however, of cardinal BEMBO, and VITTORIA COLONNA, those great luminaries of that age, leave no doubt of his amazing eloquence, before he abandoned ITALY and the ROMISH church. The annals of the capuchins (1) mention him as a man who by his masterly elocution governed every thing, and inform us that he was generously patronised by VITTORIA COLONNA, marchioness of PESCARA, a woman of elevated genius, and exquisite discernment. But the authority of BEMBO is still more express. In a letter to that lady he earnestly intreats her, in the name of the principal VENETIAN nobility, to prevail, if possible, upon BERNARDINO to visit VENICE ; and, having obtained his desire, he again writes her as follows (2) : “ I have attended every

(1) Bover. Annal. Capucc. addarm. 1538.

(2) Lett. del Bembo vol. 4. par. 1.

“ sermon which our very reverend father
 “ BERNARDINO has delivered in the few
 “ days of the present lent, with greater
 “ pleasure than I can well express. I con-
 “ fess I have never heard a more instructive
 “ or more pious preacher, nor am I at all
 “ surpris’d that your ladyship should so
 “ much admire him. His subjects are va-
 “ rious; and his discourses contain a
 “ greater number of useful observations,
 “ handled with a truer spirit of christian
 “ charity, than any that have appeared in
 “ my time. He is the delight of every one;
 “ and when he leaves us will carry with him
 “ the hearts of this whole city.”

SUCH a testimony from so great a man,
 published before OCHINO’s apostacy, is a
 convincing proof of his excellence; but the
 ITALIANS, deterred perhaps by the misfor-
 tunes which afterwards beset him, neglected

to cultivate the eloquence of the pulpit. Ecclesiastical discipline was at this time greatly relaxed; the vices of the laity, particularly the nobles, enormous. A zealous preacher could not help inveighing against both. But the powerful laymen, enraged to hear themselves reflected upon, though indirectly, from the pulpit, persecuted the orator, and if unable to hurt him further, drove him from place to place, both by calumny and open violence.

BERNARDINO DA FELTRO, another famous preacher, was banished from FLORENCE where he successfully preached the gospel (3) by the influence of the house of MEDICIS, and his discourses at BOLOGNA afterwards exposed him to the danger of assassination from the resentment of JOHN BENTIVOGLIO, a powerful inhabitant, or rather sovereign, of that city.

(3) Wadding ann. Minor. Obs. tom. 14 & 15.

SAVONAROLA too was condemned to the flames, no less through the animosity of faction, than by the authority and power of the Pope and the inquisitors (4). But to touch the vices of the clergy became still more dangerous after LUTHER had begun to propagate his new doctrines. Whoever attempted it was instantly crushed under the injurious epithets of Lutheran, Innovator, Heretic. Even the belles-lettres were suspected, as would appear from the accusations raised against FLAMINIO, CONTARINI, and the cardinals POLE and MORONE, men of eminence in the literary world, and of a turn very different from that of declaimers (5). The learned priests and monks were, no doubt, greatly discouraged by the tragical fate of SAVONAROLA, and the persecution of BARNARDINO OCHINO, that prince of the

(4). Guiciard. lib. 3.

(5) V. Pallav. Stor. del Concil. di Trento.

laced oratory of his age. With regard to religion, indeed, I believe the suspicion was just; but the hatred and envy of the prelates and courtiers of ROME was universally supposed to be the true cause of their ruin. Be that as it may, almost all who were inclined to the pulpit, and qualified to shine in it, were deterred by the tyranny of the laity, and the power of the clergy.

XII. ECCLESIASTICS, however, as well as laymen, who, in another age or country, would have adorned the bar or the pulpit, now signalised themselves in other branches of literature. Many of the most eminent literati I have mentioned, were clergymen, some of them prelates. History, however, was their favourite study; yet of the many who attempted it, how few attained eminence, though possessed of those admirable models left by MACHIAVEL and GUIC-

CIARDINE

GIARDINE about the beginning of the century, and though this is the only branch of literature which usually receives perfection from time ! But compleat historians are perhaps still more rare than compleat masters of any art whatever. Learning and genius, imagination and judgment, qualities which will alone form an excellent poet, painter, or philosopher, are insufficient for the historian ; who, besides these, must possess, what very few can attain, an opportunity of procuring certain information, authentic records ; a soul that can so far look down on danger and all the advantages of civil life, as boldly to write the truth, and that only, without courting the favour of the great, or dreading their resentment. I will not pretend to determine whether GUICCIARDINE, far less MACHIAVEL, enjoyed these important requisites ; but certain I am, that very few historians of the sixteenth century imitated

imitated the majesty of the former, the correctness, perspicuity, and elegance of the latter. Many, indeed, imitated the negligence, I will not call it wilful falsehood, of MACHIAVEL, more still, the inaccurate, unpolished, though elevated and noble, style of GUICCIARDINE. So many writers, however, wrote the history of ITALY, that, in the sixteenth century, there was not a province whose transactions were not recorded either in LATIN or ITALIAN. But towards the close of it, some histories appeared, which, though confined to a particular province, and the period of a few years, will shine immortal, above the mediocrity of the rest.

SCIPIONE AMMIRATO, author of several other useful works, has left a history of FLORENCE written with so much judgment, so much perspicuity and elegance, that in my
opinion,

opinion, he is the best, I had almost said a perfect, model for ITALIAN history. If he is not so universally known, the reason is, that such as attempt a compleat history of any nation seldom become famous, unless chance, or an uncommon political genius should enable him to issue into light. Those, on the other hand, who, versed in the transactions of the world and of courts, write the history of their own age and country, may much more easily ensure success. Who is there unacquainted with DAVILA's history of the civil wars of FRANCE, with BENTIVOGLIO's history of the wars of FLANDERS? Indeed even these sometimes displease by their over-rounded periods, an effect of that refinement which, as we shall presently find, had already crept into the ITALIAN literature.

XIII. FEW of the philosophers, critics, moralists, or politicians of those days have maintained an equal reputation with the poets and historians. An ill-placed attachment to the doctrines of ARISTOTLE made many lose themselves in subtilties, distinctions, and dry, barren disquisitions, unintelligible to most readers, intolerable to all. Of this kind are the discourses and rhetoric of CAVALCANTI; and PICCOLOMINI is not entirely free from the same fault. Others again, following PLATO and CICERO, never wrote but in dialogue, a method which generally tires the reader before he comes to the subject. From the good sense and excellent language of CASTIGLIONE'S *CORTIGIANO*, it is probable that this work would have been much more valuable had he followed the manner of CICERO in his treatise *de officiis*, rather than that *de oratore*. SPERON SPERONI, who in spirit and elegance is

no wise inferior to PLUTARCH, likewise adopted this foolish custom. SANSOVINI, VARCHI (the one a politician, the other a grammarian, and both writers of some eminence) nay BEMBO himself seem to have been incapable of speaking in their own characters.

XIV. WERE I not afraid of offending the delicate admirers of smooth expression, who imagine that dialogue opens a more extensive field for genius, I might say that it was this indiscreet imitation of PLATO and CICERO, which diffused an air of unimportance over many ITALIAN writings, and perhaps reduced us to the necessity of studying those of foreigners, which appear more regular, and less incumbered, though with no greater fund of knowledge, and perhaps only abridgments of our own authors.

BUT

BUT upon a nearer view we shall find, that as poetry has, in every nation, been the first effort of genius, so dialogue, which greatly resembles poetry, was among the GREEKS and ROMANS, the first step towards prosaic excellence. PLATO and XENOPHON, CICERO and VARRO, the first masters of prose, wrote almost always in dialogue. At length, however, literature either naturally lost, or the men of taste rejected, this effiminacy, and assumed a conciser style.

CASA and MACHIAVEL were perhaps the first who discovered that propriety of writing, and its real strength, did by no means consist in the poetical intricacy of different speakers. The latter indeed wrote his ARTE DELLA GUERRA in dialogue, but his other works are much more generally read. Had not CASA likewise done so in his GALATEO, a work comparable to the PARÆNESIS of

ISOCRATES

ISOCRATES, the OFFICES of CICERO, or the ENCHIRIDION of EPICTETUS, its reputation would probably have rather encreased than diminished.

YET there was one man of genius who detested the superfluity of dialogue, and was better qualified than any other to write with accuracy and judgment either in philosophy or literature. But an insuperable spirit of criticism confined him to commentary, instead of composition; in which respect he resembled the great BARBEYRAC, who, endued with the greatest talents for morality, and the law of nations, spent his whole life in explaining the intricate works of GROTIUS and PUFFENDORF.

XV. TOWARDS the close of this century, when letters, if I may be allowed to say so, were just approaching to maturity,
composition

composition would have perhaps assumed a better form, had not taste at the same time sunk into decay. Before we enter into the causes of this change, I shall only mention, as a proof of the ardour with which literature was cultivated, that all the valuable writings of antiquity appeared in ITALIAN in the course of the sixteenth century. PLATO, CICERO, PLUTARCH, and all the eminent historians of GREECE and ROME were translated by DOLCE, DOMENICHI, and REMIGIO FIORENTINO. No nation ever produced, in so short a space, such a number of good translations: and one advantage, at least, is peculiar to ITALY, that her translators in past ages are not become obsolete, as AMYOT, and even DU RYER and ABLANCOURT, in FRANCE. Nay I do not suppose that POPE's translation of HOMER, or any other work of the kind, will ever possess such lasting applause as the translation

lation of the *ÆNEID* by ANNIBAL CARO. About the end of the century, however, all genius for translation, as well as original composition, seemed greatly to decline.

C H A P. VI.

- I. *The decline of taste in ITALY.* II. *Observations upon TASSO and his imitators.* III. *The corruption of literature of every kind.* IV. *The advantages it enjoyed in the last century.* V. *The revival of taste in the present age.*

WORKS of literature, as I have already repeatedly observed, are enervated by subtilty and refinement, and in proportion as they are laboured their merit decreases. For fifty years and upwards ITALIANS of every denomination, and of both sexes, eagerly cultivated LATIN, as well as ITALIAN poetry. Their productions were chiefly lyric and epic; but these subjects being at length exhausted, and the public cloyed with trifling thoughts expressed in languid, though harmonious, numbers, they were obliged to explore

explored a new path ; in which they succeeded tolerably at first, but soon found themselves bewildered in an unknown world.

THIS depravity was not perceptible in ITALY till after the year 1600. It is generally imputed to MARINI, a man of a glowing, fertile genius ; of such talents for poetry, that, if we except OVID, whom our ITALIAN likewise resembles in licentiousness both of sentiment and language, his equal is hardly to be found in the annals of literature. It were to be wished indeed that we could lay the blame upon him alone, as the obscenity of his poems has rendered the name of MARINI universally detested. We must recur, I am afraid, to a more remote source for the origin of those abuses which, in the seventeenth century, reigned with such restless sway.

FAVOURITE authors are the first corrupters of taste ; and their reputation is always, in some degree, fatal to the fine arts, either by anticipating the whole field of beauty, or authorising blemishes, of which the most perfect master can never be totally divested. Thus was an excess of metaphor and antithesis, allusion and conceit, introduced into ITALY by some of our most admired poets. ANGELO DA COSTANZO, who flourished about the year 1550, is still ranked among the first of his age ; but, fond of novelty and refinement, ambitious of rising above the rest of PETRARCH's imitators, he passed the bounds of nature. In his sonnets, which in effect are epigrams, the thoughts are so laboured, fabulous allusions so frequent, that his followers almost unavoidably fell into downright affectation and obscurity.

II. Tasso's epic poem is certainly much more accurate than those of ARIOSTO, and BOIARDO. Some judicious critics have blamed him indeed for introducing so many love-episodes, yet is he infinitely more chaste than the other two. His accuracy, refinement, and studied majesty gained him reputation, but banished simplicity and natural elegance from a considerable part of ITALY. No poet was ever admired by so many readers of different tastes. The best critics of the age extolled him. BENI preferred him to HOMER and VIRGIL; BOC-CALINI ranked him in PARNASSUS as the prince of poets, and celebrated his GIERUSALEMME as the model of poetic composition. THUANUS, BALZAC, TEISSIER, RAPIN, and most other foreigners, agree in his praise, but with more discretion than his countrymen. His fame, in short, became so firmly established that the FRENCH

SATIRIST would not attempt to censure him; and GRAVINA, the critic, though far from a timid writer, was afraid to give his unreserved opinion of him. AMINTA, a tragi-comic pastoral of the same poet, and the PASTOR FIDO of GUARINI, which is an imitation of it superior to the original, enervated the drama by introducing too complex plots, unnatural characters, a laboured style, and love as almost the only province of the theatre.

CHIABRERA too, who by energy and grandeur of expression raised himself above the multitude of inferior poets of the sixteenth century, occasioned an extravagant affectation of the sublime, and compleated the fatal triumvirate. Every one imitated GUARINI, CHIABRERA, MARINI, and above all the great TASSO who in prose as well as verse authorised the abuse of figure and conceit.

conceit. The funeral oration of the duke of FERRARA will sufficiently exemplify the ridiculous style of the seventeenth century. Had this corruption indeed advanced no farther, it might have been tolerable. But an imitator generally copies the faults of his author, be they ever so few; and where the latter uses one bold or licentious figure, the former will abuse ten. This was precisely the case with the followers of TASSO and CHIABRERA at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

III. AT length the prejudices of the age became too powerful for the laws of taste; and all the ancients fell into neglect but such as resembled their favourite authors in bombast and conceit. MARTIAL and LUCAN occupied the place due to CATULLUS and VIRGIL. The satires of SALVATOR ROSA and BENEDICT MENZINI evince that

the hyperbolical declamation of JUVENAL was more carefully imitated than the delicacy of HORACE. TESAURO, who wrote a few tragedies, shews likewise how little he regarded the excellent models of SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, whilst he imitated almost literally, the *ŒDIPUS* and *HIPPOLYTUS* of SENECA. The same spirit passed from poetry to prose, and all the branches of literature. To them CICERO was languid, compared with SENECA, not to say futile and verbose; and CURTIUS and FLORUS were superior to CÆSAR, SALLUST, and NEPOS. Having once left the paths of taste, the farther they advanced, the more they were corrupted. Neither PLINY, MAMERTINUS, nor any writer since the decline of LATIN letters, ever equalled their bombast, affectation, and extravagant abuse of allegory and every species of figure. I speak not of those who wrote in LATIN. LIPSIUS,

SIUS, however, who travelled into ITALY, and was perhaps tainted with the prevailing humour of the country, may serve to shew the corruption which threatened LATIN elegance, at the close of the sixteenth century. After having been one of the triumvirs, as they were called, of the republic of letters, and imitated, with success, the simplicity and natural purity of CICERO, he in his old age adopted a pointed, figurative, and excessively concise style; which would soon have proved fatal to his countrymen, had not SCIOPPIUS, MARESIUS, and VOSSIUS, early observed the growing evil, and nipt it in the bud. But in many provinces of ITALY, where the ITALIAN was the language of the learned, this practice kept no bounds. The very titles of books may evince it. They laboured to make even them extraordinary and uncommon, resembling those of the ancient masters of

pedantry and refinement. Not to mention the *CANNOCCHIALE ARISTOTELICO*, PANIGAROLA, who was one of the principal orators of his time, entitled his treatise of sacred eloquence *DEMETRIUS PHALEREUS*, as if desirous of emulating that corrupter of *ATTIC* purity. If we are to form a judgment of the literature of the seventeenth century from these works, from the sermons of MORONE, PAOLETTI, GORLA, OLIVA, SASSOLINI, and many others, what can we say in its praise?

IV. BUT notwithstanding these bad examples, which are still almost before our eyes; notwithstanding the common prejudice that the seventeenth century was a lamentable period for letters, I am apt to believe that as many valuable authors lived in that as in the preceding century. I shall not mention the numbers who flourished abroad, or
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attempt to shew by what means religious controversy awakened the study of ecclesiastical antiquities, and theology was recovered, chiefly by BELLARMINE, from the narrowness of scholastic speculation to its original dignity and grandeur. Nor shall I dwell upon the revival of jurisprudence by ALCIATUS, ANASTASIUS, GERMONIUS and CUJACCIUS, from that barbarity which had for many ages overwhelmed it; yet these important revolutions were accomplished about the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century. Towards the close of the latter, medicine likewise was restored by BORELLI, with whose writings, as an eminent authority informs us, every student of that science should be acquainted. MALPIGHI, his friend, illustrated nature, particularly anatomy, and promoted the study of it in every corner of EUROPE. These, and others no less famous, as the cardinals

NORRIS, BONA and DELUCA, I pass over, as they wrote in LATIN, and confined themselves to scientific subjects, which are foreign to our purpose.

WHILST TASSO, or rather his imitators, corrupted the natural beauty of poetry, GALILEO GALILEI arose, whom the universal voice of EUROPE has proclaimed the first restorer of the mathematics, as well as the first and most elegant writer upon that subject in the ITALIAN language. REDI and VALLISNIERI soon after wrote upon medicine with equal purity. Cardinal PALAVICINO, besides other less famous works, published in the most correct ITALIAN, the history of the council of TRENT. The first books, indeed, are tinged with the literary errors of the age, which perhaps dropped from the pen of father ALCIATO, who began the work; yet the narration is not
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only perspicuous and simple, but, from the numerous digressions upon various controversies that were necessarily interwoven with the subject, may likewise serve as a model for any ITALIAN writer upon theological or ecclesiastical affairs. SEGNERI, the father of christian eloquence in the ITALIAN tongue, enriched and ennobled the language, by his valuable writings, almost as much as all the prose-writers of the sixteenth century; and next to him JEROME DE NARNI, a capuchin, had the glory of surpassing all the preachers who flourished for an hundred years after and many ages before him. Had the cotemporaries of GALILEO, REDI, VALISNIERI, PALLAVICINO and SEGNERI, imitated them by writing upon useful and scientific subjects in ITALIAN, and shunned the prevailing bombast and pedantry of allusion and conceit, knowledge would have made much greater progress, and the nation

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in general have become more polished and enlightened. Even the unskilled in the learned languages would have studied the sciences, and foreigners would have had no pretence for their erroneous supposition that the true and uniform characteristic of ITALIAN composition was a pompous display of false thoughts, brilliantly expressed. There are besides some very learned authors, who, by various writings, evince that ITALY was not entirely divested of literary genius. These, far from adopting the reigning corruptions, expressly reproved them, particularly MASCARDI and PALLAVICINO, the last of whom considered them at large as a new and particular, though destructive, art. And, what is worthy of observation, father BARTOLI, carried away with the current, often fell into those very errors which he condemned equally with PALLAVICINO and MASCARDI.

As a proof that to secure the applause of posterity, the only infallible judge, we must prefer nature and simplicity to refinement and extravagance ; let me mention one observation upon SEGNERI and MASCARDI. The latter intent in his art of history upon laying down his rules and observations in a plain, easy manner, chose not to interlard it with superfluous ornaments ; and it is still read without disgust. But fond of displaying his genius and wit, he adapted his discourses upon the TABLATURE of CEBES, and some of his panegyrics, to the reigning taste ; and they are now neglected by every discerning reader. In like manner the CRISTIANO, the PENITENTE ISTRUITO, and such other works of SEGNERI as are professedly written in a familiar style, are more generally read than his panegyrics. Perhaps the true cause why these have sunk into neglect is his clogging them with figures, and unnatural, abstruse thoughts.

thoughts. In fine, it is evident that the authors of that age wrote with most elegance when, confined by their subject, they had no opportunity of hunting after conceits. Thus it was with TASSO, the style of whose APOLOGY is greatly superior to that of any of his other works. In this he employed himself wholly upon the merits of his cause, and laying aside trifling embellishments, expressed himself with genuine simplicity and force.

THE abuses of the seventeenth century were, however, productive of some advantages. The ITALIANS, at length sensible of their error, assumed a style more solid and accurate than hitherto it had been vain and servile. Thus were the defects of literature in the last century subservient to its advancement in this to a perfection unknown even in the age of BEMBO and of CASA. The sciences,
enriched.

enriched by many discoveries, have been better handled, and in a more natural style; and history, eloquence, poetry, especially dramatic, which are the chief branches of the belles-lettres, greatly improved by a well-regulated study of the ancients, and perhaps too of the FRENCH.

V. IT would be tedious to enumerate all the men of genius and learning who have appeared in ITALY within these forty years. I shall, however, without disparaging the rest, mention five or six who, in different parts of ITALY, have revived with remarkable assiduity and success a spirit of literature. APOSTOLO ZENO, the VENETIAN, the prince of the ITALIAN literati of his age, was one of the first who introduced a natural turn of sentiment and expression. GRAVINA, at the same time, used every effort to induce the lovers of the fine arts at NAPLES and ROME

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to study and imitate the GREEK, LATIN, and old ITALIAN classics; desirous, it would appear, to atone for the abuses which three of his ingenious countrymen had introduced upwards of an hundred years before. Both he and LAZZARINI have failed indeed in those poems which they intended as models for the imitation of the ancients, yet they certainly had the salutary effect of recalling to mind the rules and examples of antiquity. Many illustrious ornaments of the present age are proud to acknowledge themselves the disciples of GRAVINA and LAZZARINI. Abbot TAGLIAZUCCHI too, though he has left nothing valuable either for sublimity of genius or depth of erudition, has been considered as the principal restorer of taste in LOMBARDY and PIEDMONT. Appointed by the king of SARDINIA to the professorship of the belles-lettres, he wrote some elegant little pieces,

illustrated

illustrated the best authors to his students, and extinguished that false splendor which had dazzled our fathers. In what part of the literary world, is not the name of MURATORI celebrated? If we consider only his style, it will indeed appear extraordinary that the revival of taste should be greatly owing to him. But if we likewise consider what pains he took to elucidate the history of ITALY, to combat the corruptions of literature, which, in his early years, were so numerous, and so inveterate, the wonder will cease, and we shall confess him entitled to the warmest acknowledgements of the republic of letters.

THE marquis SCIPIO MAFFEI, who has given to youth so noble an example of the preference of learning to riches, titles, or the honours of a court, and what glory it confers even upon the highest birth; MAF-

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FEI, I say, avoiding the imperfections, possessed almost all the excellencies, of MURATORI's style. He was one of the first who united the most exalted understanding with the purest diction, without hunting after FLORENTINE idioms, or affecting the intricate periods of BOCCACE. I omit several eminent literati that have appeared in TUSCANY. That province was in fact much less tainted with the corruptions of the last century than the rest of ITALY; though not entirely exempted from them, as appears from the poems of FILICIAIA, and the satires of MENZINI. About the year 1700 the study of humanity was likewise remarkably successful in BOLOGNA, whose ancient title of LEARNED was more than ever confirmed by MANFREDI, BECCARI, ZANOTTI, and many others, equally deserving of applause with the most illustrious authors of the sixteenth century.

C H A P.

C H A P. VII.

I. *Of SPANISH literature.* II. *Opinion of a modern author concerning its defects.*

WERE I as intimately acquainted with the SPANISH, as I am with the ITALIAN literature, I would, with pleasure, compare their progress and revolutions. But though it is not my intention to speak at large of the SPANISH writers, I must not altogether omit them. To begin then with the sixteenth century, an age in which the belles-lettres flourished equally in both countries. ANTONIO, AGOSTINO, and MELCHIOR CANO, evince their success in LATIN composition, sacred as well as profane. Nor would it be an easy task to number up the writers in SPANISH upon every branch of literature. Their style was already equally formed with
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the ITALIAN, and entirely the same as now; no inconsiderable argument of the natural constancy of that nation, or of the perfection and stability of their language. The number of SPANISH works translated into ITALIAN, and their translations of our most famous poets during the reigns of CHARLES V. and PHILIP II. manifestly prove that that age produced as many eminent writers in SPAIN as in ITALY. If the ITALIANS, at this time partly subjected to the SPANISH dominion, did not introduce, they doubtless greatly promoted, the belles-lettres. In some respects, indeed, the SPANIARDS surpassed us, particularly in history, morality, politics, and the other useful parts of literature. But in poetry, the more we admire their genius and fertile imagination, the more we must lament their want of care and judgment. Let us leave DON ALONSO d'ERCILLA in full possession of the praise he

has

has acquired by his ARANCANA ; let us even allow that in amorous lyric poetry they have equalled the ITALIANS. As the expression constitutes the principal merit of such compositions, a foreigner will hardly be able to form a just opinion of them. I shall therefore confine my remarks to the drama.

THE SPANIARDS may well boast that they have surpassed every other nation in the number of tragedies and tragi-comedies ; nor can it be denied, that the first dramatists of FRANCE and ENGLAND have borrowed many of their beauties from the SPANISH poets. Yet hardly are any of them known beyond the confines of the SPANISH dominions, if we except LOPEZ DE VEGA, a cotemporary of T'ASSO ; famous for an incredible number of pieces, and CAMOENS, by far the greatest, if not the only, PORTUGUESE poet known in ITALY. The former wrote no less
than

than one thousand eight hundred plays, besides a great many other poems. But is it to be supposed that a man who wrote so many pieces could have time to perfect one? If it is true, as it is certainly very probable, and asserted by the best critics, that no nation can produce above ten or twelve finished comedies, and the like number of tragedies, human nature being unable to afford a greater variety of characters, and interesting incidents; of what value can such a number be? No wonder then that writers of this stamp did not attain the same excellence with those of other countries. All the learned nations of EUROPE have had reason to complain in some degree or other, of the negligence of their writers; but among the SPANISH poets, this evil has been still more epidemic, and is perhaps the true cause that the literary reputation of the SPANIARDS, has been so much confined to their own dominions: since
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the scholastic subtilties of SAUREZ, VASQUEZ, and SALMANTICENSI, which have indeed been known abroad, can never be included under any of the branches of the belles-lettres.

II. BEFORE I conclude, I shall beg leave to adduce the opinion of a modern SPANISH critic of the defects of sacred oratory in SPAIN, which will serve to point out the genius of their literature in late years, from the analogy subsisting between all its different branches; or at least will convince us that eloquence is every where subject to the same influence. “Of the multitude of preachers” says that learned author, “there are hardly any who know the parts of which a discourse should be composed. Of the numberless sermons how few are there worthy of the name! how few which contain any thing but

“ a string of absurdities, of witticisms without judgment, of subtilties without solidity, of words without meaning.”

THE true and original causes of the corruption of pulpit-eloquence, especially in SPAIN, may be reduced to these: the contempt which those who have the disposal of cures generally entertain of the profession; the neglect of many of the clergy, and downright incapacity of the rest, to instruct themselves in it; but above all the depraved taste of the hearers, who applaud what they ought to detest, and detest what they ought to applaud.

IT is notorious also that in almost all the religious orders in SPAIN, the professorial character is infinitely more rejected than the clerical.

THE same author likewise reproves his countrymen for some abuses which, in the last century, were prevalent in ITALY, and which are still observable in a few antiquated preachers; I mean “ That confused, puerile
 “ medley of citations, texts, and authorities
 “ of every kind thrust in without method,
 “ without choice, without the smallest
 “ propriety, and generally only for the
 “ sake of some trifling similitude; that
 “ intolerable practice of equally adopting
 “ profane and sacred authorities; of mentioning MARTIAL, HORACE, CATULLUS, and VIRGIL in the same breath with
 “ St. PAUL and the PROPHETS; and quoting BEYERLINTE, MAFFEIANO, AULUS GELLIUS; and NATALCOMITE oftener
 “ than the fathers of the church; that
 “ impious attempt to defend the most sacred
 “ mysteries, the most exemplary actions,

“ of the SAINTS by some fable, mythologi-
“ cal anecdote, or pagan superstition ; that
“ inflated, fantastic style, so extravagant,
“ so barbarous, that it is neither LATIN,
“ GREEK, nor SPANISH, but an unna-
“ tural composition of them all.”

THUS were the corruptions of literature introduced into SPAIN, as well as other countries, after authors had written with simplicity, propriety, and decorum. Thus GRANTA, RODRIGUEZ, and St. THOMAS of VILLANOVA, those models of christian oratory, had already flourished. I shall not, however, determine whether the deviation of SPANISH oratory from solidity to conceit, from simplicity to affectation, was occasioned by any ITALIAN preacher of the last century, who had perhaps gained a reputation in SPAIN, or by the natural vicissitude of letters.

C H A P. VIII.

- I. *Dawnings of literature in FRANCE.* II. *Its revolution under FRANCIS the first, and his immediate successors.* III. *Authors in the age of LEWIS the thirteenth.* IV. *Establishment of the FRENCH language and literature.* V. *Excellent poets, orators, and writers of every kind.*

WHILST literature was at the summit of perfection in FRANCE, it was visibly on the decline in ITALY and SPAIN. In the present century, again, as FRANCE sunk, ITALY and SPAIN emerged. Formerly the ITALIANS were induced to cultivate their native language by the example of the PROVENÇALISTS ; and two ages after, the FRENCH were in their turn obliged to the ITALIANS, in some measure likewise to the SPANIARDS, for the same advantage.

BUT it is at present foreign to our purpose to consider the present state of letters in ITALY; and whatever may be said of the last century, it is beyond all doubt that the FRENCH were then the chief ornaments of literature, an honour which had belonged to ITALY for three ages before. In the course of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, the ITALIANS, if we except perhaps a few SPANIARDS, were the only authors that could write in their native tongue, without the danger of becoming obsolete: and we have already seen that unless the vulgar idiom is established, letters can never flourish.

THE FRENCH, like every other language, was long used only in ballad and romance. HARDOUIN indeed wrote, in the thirteenth century, a FRENCH history of a croisade in which he had served. But a work like this,
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from the nature of the narrative, and the frigidity of the writer, is little superior to a romance; and his style is infinitely more incorrect than that of the ITALIANS before DANTE.

II. UNDER FRANCIS the first, who acquired more glory from his patronage of letters than from his wars with CHARLES the fifth, the learning and diligence of BUDÆUS, TURNEUS, LAMBINUS, and ROBERTUS STEPHANUS, laid an excellent foundation for literature in FRANCE. But this would never have produced such great effects had not measures been likewise taken to regulate and fix the vulgar language. Most of these, immersed in the study of the ancients, not only neglected their native tongue, but would have thought their learning debased by adopting an idiom which sprung not from some tolerable author. Two circumstances, how-

ever, happily conducted to its establishment; I mean the poems of MAROT, and the arrêt of FRANCIS, ordering that the public acts, which were formerly in LATIN, should be for the future written in FRENCH. That great prince hearing, one day, a LATIN decree read before him, in which the words DEBOTAVIT and DEBOTAT occurred, conceived such an abhorrence of that ridiculous jargon, that he immediately banished it from the courts of justice, and substituted the natural language of the country. The notaries, and other officers of the law, now endeavoured to enrich it with variety. The poems of CLEMENT MAROT about the same time began to regulate and harmonise it, and it was soon relished at the courts of the FRENCH king, and the queen of NAVARRE, who was likewise an eminent patroness of genius. But its native purity and simplicity narrowly escaped a total overthrow from

from the learning of some of their first poets. Of these RONSARD was the most remarkable, both for genius and erudition. He endeavoured to introduce compound epithets, in imitation of the GREEKS, and was immoderately fond of terms of art and allusions to science. Though such a style may appear harsh to nicer years, yet it then met with such universal applause, that the learned MURET thought it not below him to write a commentary upon RONSARD; who, though now neglected, still retains the glorious title of prince of the FRENCH poets.

IODEL and JOHN DE LA PEROUSE, however, attempted the drama with better taste, which before their time in FRANCE, as before TRISSINO in ITALY, consisted of puerile, absurd representations of the lives of the saints. At the same time PETER RA-

MUS, who did and suffered so much to expel ARISTOTLE from the schools, likewise exerted himself to fix the rules of his native language, with the assistance (1) of ROBERT and HENRY STEPHEN, and MARK ANTHONY OUDINET, interpreter to the king.

III. BUT MALHERBE, the master of every true grammarian, and of every elegant writer since his time, bravely exploded the abuses of NERVESE, DESACUTEAUX, and RONSARD : and VAUGELAS, being employed by cardinal RICHELIEU to compile the Academy's Dictionary, laid down more certain rules for ascertaining the language, more fully illustrated it, " and will remain the " oracle of FRANCE, so long as the " FRENCH are jealous of the purity of " their tongue (2)."

(1) V. Goujet Bibliot : Franç. p. 1. chap. 2.

(2) Bouhours ap. Baillet jugemens des Savans.

It must, however, be confessed, that many illustrious FRENCHMEN have made great complaints that the academy in general, and VAUGELAS in particular, have, under pretence of polishing, enervated the language, and fettered genius, which, besides the advantage of unrestrained composition, would have rendered it more copious, and varied the cadence and construction. Even in these days, many have wished for the style of MONTAIGNE, ARRIGOT and VOITURE (3). I do not deny that less restraint might have been beneficial to many, and enriched the language. A greater harmony and diversity of style, a greater variety of expression, might have rendered their prose more lofty, as well as more copious, and their poetry more luxuriant; but that perspicuity which the sensible part of every nation so much admire in the FRENCH writers,

(3) See M. Fenelon's letter to the French academy, entitled, *Lettre sur la Rhetorique*.

would have been entirely lost. The more numerous the words and phrases of a language are, the more intricate is the construction, and the more difficult the attainment of it, especially to foreigners ; and it is therefore highly probable that had the FRENCH tongue been less confined, it had been less universally used.

IV. FATHER BOUHOURS, whom I just now quoted, a celebrated, though unjust, defamer of ITALIAN literature, though not so violent as HENRY STEPHEN, had a chief hand in fixing the standard and genius of the FRENCH language. In this respect he rivalled our BEMBO, since both ennobled and enriched their respective languages, and promoted the study of them by elegant dialogues upon their beauties and rules. There remained, however, among the learned an obstinacy or timidity which checked the progress

gress of the FRENCH language. Father LINGENDES, whose sermons were received from the pulpit with incredible applause, despairing of their being read by posterity, if published in the language in which they had been delivered, printed them in LATIN. MEZERAU and DES CARTES, the MACHIAVEL and GALILEO of FRANCE, were among the first who wrote the vulgar tongue with purity and precision; the one in history and politics, the other in philosophy and the mathematics. The PROVINCIAL LETTERS which, after a whole century, and so many alterations in the FRENCH tongue, contain not one obsolete word, paved the way for theological and critical compositions in the language of the country; and soon after the TELEMACHUS of FENELON, and the Universal History of BOSSUET, enriched it with a degree of energy, copiousness, and harmony

mony of which 'till then it had been thought incapable.

V. EQUALLY great, and more rapid, was the progress of poetry. In a few years CORNEILLE, RACINE, BOILEAU, MOLIERE, FONTAINE, and ROUSSEAU, in some respects equalled, in others surpassed, their GREEK, LATIN, ITALIAN, and in dramatic compositions particularly, their SPANISH masters. From GUILLEN DE CASTRO, one of the latter, CORNEILLE took the subject of his famous CID, the piece which first raised FRENCH tragedy to such distinguished splendor. It would be no difficult undertaking to shew how much not only these but FRENCH writers of every denomination, have borrowed from other nations, and that they have done little more than new-model the writings of others; had not they themselves, and particularly VOLTAIRE (4), frankly

(4) Hist. du siècle de Louis XIV.

confessed it. Nay, as the highest applause VOLTAIRE could receive, a certain journalist has recommended him for having so judiciously improved upon the works of foreigners. So far am I from wishing to diminish by this the reputation of the FRENCH literature, that I firmly believe they could not have succeeded if they had done otherwise. Nature, which is the soul of the belles-lettres, is one and immutable; it is therefore necessary to follow, in a certain degree, the first authors who trod in her steps. If a man of a happy, well regulated genius, should attempt to chalk out a new path, how soon would he find himself obliged to return to the beaten track!

BE that as it will, if the FRENCH did not invent much, they certainly exceeded every
other

other nation in accuracy and perspicuity; in ease, elegance, and propriety of style; in the art of producing excellent pieces from originals hardly tolerable in themselves, by the assistance of order and delicate expression; which is certainly the principal merit of a man of letters. We may safely then affirm, that no nation, ancient or modern, knew the art of composition better than the FRENCH under LEWIS XIV.

IN the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the sacred eloquence of FRANCE was at as low an ebb as that of ITALY. MENOT, OLIVER, MAILLARD and MYSSER, who were thought the CHRYSOSTOMES of their age, setting aside their antiquated language, would be now intolerable by their subtilties, scholastic distinctions, and innumerable
 quota-

quotations (5). But DE SALES, the best model of Christian eloquence at that time, COEFETTAUE, Cardinal PERRON, and afterwards the jesuits LINGENDES and CASTILLON now reformed the pulpit-oratory; and lastly BOURDALOUE, FENELON, BOSSUET, FLECHIER, and MASSILLON carried it to the highest pitch of energy and grandeur. All these preachers, however differently distinguished, have justly deserved the public applause. BOSSUET and FLECHIER, besides having acquired a great reputation, the one by the sublimity of his panegyrics, the other by his knowledge in various branches of literature and learning, are acknowledged the principal masters of funeral oratory, in which the FRENCH have undoubtedly carried off the palm. LINGENDES likewise shone in this species of sacred eloquence, insomuch that

(5) Goujet Hist. de la liter. Françoisse, p. 3. chap. 2.

FLECHIER, besides interweaving several sublime strokes from his discourse upon the death of CHARLES EMANUEL I. Duke of SAVOY, gave his famous funeral oration upon Marshal TURENNE the same text, and the same introduction.

THE eloquence of the bar was cultivated very early, but with what success, I shall not pretend to determine. The monks, who possessed the pulpit in FRANCE as well as other countries, had not yet laid aside their scholastic barbarism and obscurity, when the lawyers had become more polished, and their profession more civilised, by the study of the belles-lettres, and a commerce with the world and the court. Though their pleadings were loaded with subtilties and quotations, yet in the discussion of law-suits, these are, in general, less intolerable, and
perhaps

perhaps more necessary, than in moral exhortations. It is certain, however, that ARNAULD, who flourished in the reign of HENRY IV. LE MAITRE, PATRU, and GAUTIER in that of LEWIS XIII. though predecessors of BOSSUET, BOURDALOUE, and MASSILLON, were superior to all the succeeding barristers,

C H A P. IX.

- I. *The decline of letters in FRANCE.* II. *Reflections upon FONTENELLE and his imitators.* III. *What branches of literature remained capable of further progress after the age of LEWIS XIV.* IV. *Remarks upon MONTESQUIEU.* V. *Upon VOLTAIRE, and his tragedies.* VI. *Upon the HENRIADE.* VII. *Upon his other works.* VIII. *Consequences of them.* IX. *The literati more numerous in the decay of the belles-lettres—causes of it.* X. *Observations of D'ALEMBERT, LE BLANC, and ATTERBURY upon the state of FRENCH literature in the present century.*

THE FRENCH historians discover more judgment, perspicuity, and method, as well as a truer spirit of criticism, than those

of other modern nations. Indeed every species of composition was cultivated in the last century with the greatest success, except the epic, in which alone the FRENCH are still inferior. This success continued till an affectation of wit, and an unbounded refinement, gained ground, and corrupted their literature in little more than fifty years after the tragedies of CORNEILLE, the comedies of MOLIERE, and the PROVINCIAL LETTERS, had raised it to the highest lustre. It is not easy, however, to determine, who introduced the style, which has so generally prevailed in the present century, and given a sanction to conceit, that fatal subverter of taste.

So early as the reign of LEWIS XIV. some betrayed an ambitious display of wit rather than judgment; and a few blemishes, which afterwards became, by degrees, almost uni-

universal, began to make their apperaance even in the age of VOITURE and BALZAC. But found sense will be still admired, and the false ornaments of wit more easily relinquished, while the language and literature of a nation have not attained perfection, as in the time of these two. No sooner are they perfected, however, than they begin to decline: but the corruption is seldom great or extensive, unless promoted by some author of distinguished merit.

II. FONTENELLE then was probably the man who struck the fatal blow. DES FONTAINES in the first volume of his OPINIONS suggests this idea:

“ FONTENELLE,” says he, “ like EPI-
 “ CURUS and NEWTON, is the head of a
 “ sect to which he does not belong. His
 “ sentiments are in general just and ingeni-
 “ ous,

“ous, though sometimes abstracted and
 “sophistical, tinged with the refinement
 “of SENECA, the over regularity of PLINY,
 “or the obscurity of TACITUS; three au-
 “thors capable of enriching a ripened ge-
 “nius, or perfecting a formed taste, but
 “equally capable of forming false wits, and
 “intolerable writers. It is just so with
 “FONTENELLE. He is now seldom read;
 “but extravagance will ever be the portion
 “of him who does read and imitate him
 “before his taste is modelled by the study
 “of nature, the ancient classics, and those
 “of the age of LEWIS XIV.

A CELEBRATED writer of modern days,
 who loves conciseness and vivacity of style,
 perhaps to excess, amidst the encomiums
 he bestows upon FONTENELLE, blames
 him for his art and affectation of orna-
 ment.

ment (1). The great reputation, however, which he, on many accounts, acquired raised him a number of imitators. But unable to transfuse the genius and learning, the dignity and spirit, which animate and support their original, they only imitated, like the admirers of DEMETRIUS PHALEREUS, SENECA, and TASSO, what redounded to their own dishonour, as well as that of their master. At the same time there raged an evil still more fatal; I mean that conspiracy, which the witlings seem to have formed, to bring the ancients into contempt (2).

(1) VOLTAIRE in his TEMPLE OF TASTE, introduces the Goddess of Criticism making FOUNTENELLE the following compliment.

“Votre muse sage & riante devoit aimer un peu moins
l’art,

“Ne la gêtez point par le fard : sa couleur est assez
brillante.”

(2) DES FONTAINES, tom. 2. des observ.

“An

“ An idea of pedantry, unjustly united with
“ the study of the LATIN language, by de-
“ grees extinguished the esteem which is due
“ to the poets and orators of antiquity, who
“ are to us what ancient statues are to
“ sculptors.”

THIS certainly contributed to make the neatness of the modern style more fashionable; and the empire of wit became at last unbounded. The learned and judicious ROLLIN, observing its destructive effects, bravely opposed the torrent; and, though his opinions were not universally acknowledged just, he was universally read and admired for his easy, elegant style, and elevated sentiments; whilst, by his authority and example, he supported the ancient dignity of literature and taste. But even the efforts of so great a master, and the criti-

cisms of DES FONTAINES (1), who likewise entered the lists, were ineffectual to revive the taste of the last century; or rather to extend the bounds of nature, to create new manners and passions that succeeding writers might not be obliged to copy those who had already painted them in all their various forms. For in poetry and those other parts of literature, whose general scope is amusement, it becomes almost unavoidable, if we would distinguish ourselves from the crowd of imitators, to follow novelty in contempt of propriety and reason. The field, however, was not yet so fully occupied, as to preclude all improvement, had not the defects of style,

(1) Il étoit ennemi déclaré du Phœbus, du clinquant, de la pointe; il a combattu ce mauvais goût sans respect humain, & sans relâche: en cela notre littérature lui a des obligations essentielles.

Mém. de Trevoux.

and

and an indiscreet attachment to novelty, like a contagion, infected, more or less, every branch of letters.

III. THOUGH small success was to be expected from tragedy or comedy after CORNEILLE, RACINE and MOLIERE; from satire, lyric poetry or fable, after BOILEAU, ROUSSEAU and FONTAINE; the sacred orators might certainly have gained reputation had they followed the footsteps of BOURDALOUE, BOSSUET, MASSILLON, and FLECHIER, since the great and important truths of morality and religion will always give full scope to eloquence, if the clergy will be satisfied with a style adapted to the gravity of the pulpit. But the FRENCH sermons are now generally crowded with witticisms (1), and extravagant sallies, instead of the natural beauty

(1) Lettres d'un François.

and majesty for which those of the last century are so deservedly admired. Indeed if we do not confine sacred literature to the pulpit, it must be confessed that some most elegant pieces have appeared even of late. Of these are many of the pastoral letters and charges of zealous and learned bishops; who, intent upon the spiritual happiness of their flocks, inculcate the practice of christianity, and of ecclesiastical discipline, eloquently, because naturally, and rather with the fulness of a paternal heart, than with studied efforts of genius.

LET us now turn to the eloquence of the bar, and we shall find that many speeches of the advocates, and remonstrances of the parliaments, are still written in a style that may compare with the most perfect orations of ATHENS or ROME. Employed in the examination of causes, in the management of business,

business, in the study of law and equity, they have no time to throw away in search of the puerile ornaments of rhetoric, and therefore retain a dignity and energy unknown to the lovers of refinement. Thus likewise in ITALY we have men engaged in the management of affairs, and the administration of justice, whose speeches before their sovereign, or in the assemblies of the magistrates, discover more solid eloquence than the laboured harangues of the most renowned declaimers. Yet have not the FRENCH advocates altogether escaped the contagious influence of affectation and false wit. The celebrated FERRASSON (1), for instance, resembles ISOCRATES more than DEMOSTHENES, and has not escaped censure for his too flowery, refined style.

(1) Journal des Savans, Juin 1737.

THE extensive field of history still remained open to future study; a field which still encreases, still receives some new light, new excellence or importance, from the manner in which it is handled. Even in these days, M. GUIGNES, father BARE, and other learned men, have excelled in this species of composition. But abridgements became unfortunately prevalent, and gave rise to the many barren and superficial histories which appear every day. Little perhaps do the authors and readers of these consider that more applause is acquired from writing, more instruction from reading, an historical tract of a few years, as those of THUCYDIDES, POLYBIUS, TACITUS, GUICCIARDINI, and DAVILA, than from an epitome of even a general history of ten or twenty centuries, like those of FLORUS, PATERCULUS, and JUSTIN.

HAD not the affectation of singularity and refinement, a quaint conciseness of style, and that philosophical spirit at present so universally cried up, debased their taste in morality and criticism; these subjects, which are likewise susceptible of such a variety of pleasing and instructive forms, might have still been cultivated with success. The custom introduced of late into FRANCE, even among the ladies, of studying the mathematics, and that universal itch of writing for the stage, as the most easy and expeditious method of getting money, have also deprived the world of many ingenious men, who would have supported the dignity of letters had they turned their thoughts to other pursuits. But before we examine farther the present state of literature in FRANCE, in which I shall follow the most approved authorities (as it would be presumption in a foreigner to decide upon his own opinion)

allow me to make a few observations upon some of the most eminent literati who have appeared in that country for these thirty or forty years, and who have perhaps had no inconsiderable hand in reducing the FRENCH literature to its present situation,

IV. OF these MONTESQUIEU and VOLTAIRE (1) are beyond dispute the chief, since all who have considered the present state of the fine arts in FRANCE, have rested their opinion principally upon them. Of the former I shall say little, as I propose to consider the literary merits only of his *ESPRIT DES LOIX*. Though this is a political work, and does not directly concern the belles-lettres, yet as it is fraught with erudition, and the subject is curious and important, it must interest every reader, and

(1) *Considérations sur les Révolutions des Arts.*

by insinuating into its admirers an ambition of imitating the style and manner, have at least an occasional influence upon literature. To judge of the style, we need only run over half a volume. By style I do not mean the language alone, which indeed is elegant, proper, and correct, but the assemblage of images, the flow of one period into another, the general composition of the whole. In this respect, I am persuaded, the author can never be acquitted at the tribunal of reason and taste for his extreme delicacy, his ambiguity, his half-expressed sentiments, his conciseness, his obscurity, his unparalleled incoherence. His chapters too, which are uncommonly short, are so unconnected, that if the style were not the same, they might be mistaken for so many fragments of the pandect; since, but for the title, we frequently can scarce conceive their scope. It avails not to say that the

author designedly threw an ambiguity over his sentiments (and good cause he had for the precaution); since this could not prevent his admirers from adopting that disjointed, obscure style, so remote from true elegance. The LETTRES PERSANES are generally imputed to MONTESQUIEU, though perhaps he did little more than publish them, as free-thinkers are always happy when they have an opportunity of divulging, in the words of others, sentiments agreeable to their own genius. Yet these letters, after all the noise they have made, are little more than a collection of bold, satirical strokes, expressed with an agreeable conciseness, but without connection, unity, or order.

V. I COULD wish it were in my power to pass by the celebrated VOLTAIRE. Certain I am that all I can say will conduce but little to diminish the unbounded admiration which
many

many have conceived for him; and to those who are not of that number, who view his works with a more impartial eye, few words will explain my opinion of him. Besides, while great men are alive it is dangerous to speak of them with freedom. But as VOLTAIRE is reputed the first writer of his age in FRANCE, nay in EUROPE, and as literature and taste are even thought to be confined to him; I cannot without evident impropriety omit him. Indeed all who have the interest of letters at heart should endeavour to stem the torrent which overflows EUROPE with his works, since, however amusing, they contain nothing solid, and fatally habituate youth to the neglect of useful knowledge.

YET to say the truth, if we consider this author in any of the various spheres in which he has appeared, we may justly rank him

among the most distinguished literati. His tragedies, if not equal, are certainly little inferior, to those of the great RACINE, and deserve to be read by the lovers of this species of poetry after SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES; as in ITALY, those who study the eloquence of the bar frequently read the orations of BADOARO after those of DEMOSTHENES and CICERO. In those pieces, however, which are of his own invention, such as ZAIRE, ALZIRE, and the ORPHELIN DE LA CHINE, he disgusts many by a too frequent intermixture of religion with the theatrical passions love, jealousy, and ambition.

VI. HAD he equalled in his HENRIADE the imagination and fertility of HOMER, VIRGIL, TASSO, ARIOSTO, and MILTON, as nearly as he has our first tragedians in sublimity, pathos, and the structure of the fable,

fable, we should with wonder have seen a good epic and tragic poet in the same person, a phænomenon which has never been heard of since the world began. Although the editors of VOLTAIRE'S works have been pleased to assert that "HENRY'S dream" (which comprehends the sixth and seventh books of the HENRIADE) "has more merit than the whole ILIAD put together," they will excuse me if I say that he is infinitely below the other epic poets. The FRENCH themselves still acknowledge that there is no good heroic poem in their language (1), and foreigners remain in their old opinion that the FRENCH language and genius are unequal to the work. Be that as

(1) Il est vrai que de ce côté-là (du poëme épique) nous sommes encore au dessous de nos rivaux, que nous ne pouvons pas encore nous mettre à côté de la sublime Angleterre, ou de la brillante Italie.

Confid., sur les révol. des arts, pag. 221,

it

it will, the principal part of the HENRIADE, the whole texture of the fable, every thing poetical and noble in it, is certainly formed upon the model of VIRGIL, not to say directly borrowed from him. HENRY's visit to ENGLAND, where he relates to QUEEN ELIZABETH the causes and history of the civil war, is not only an imitation of the arrival of ÆNEAS at CARTHAGE, but is in like manner founded upon a poetical licence. The hermit is a copy of VIRGIL's sybil; and HENRY's boasted dream and extasy nothing but the descent of ULYSSES and ÆNEAS to the elysian fields, a little improved and adapted to the CHRISTIAN system. Almost every thing else in the HENRIADE is afforded by the history of the times. The descriptions of hypocrisy, politics, and fanaticism have neither beauty nor grace worthy of such a poem. The representation of the temple of love has more of the sublime, indeed,

deed, but nothing of the interesting or marvellous, which ought to constitute the sinews of the epopee. Numbers besides, disapprove of his interweaving paganism with christianity; of introducing, for instance, St. LOUIS speaking of the HOLY GHOST, and the mysteries of christianity, in the same line with the god of love; though indeed GRAVINA and others have attempted to justify the same liberty in SANNAZZARO and VIDA (1). Discord, who acts the part of JUNO in the *ÆNEID*, is a constrained character, dragged in to perform offices, which we can hardly conceive to be intended for Discord; and a devil would seem the more natural antagonist of a saint in a poem in which the christian revelation is supposed. But I shall not insist upon the defects of the *HENRIADE*, although it would be but reasonable, by way

(1) Triveri prefaz. al poema della Redenzione.

of supplement to his *ESSAI SUR LE POEME EPIQUE*, to treat *VOLTAIRE* as he has done his predecessors. If indeed, he is not comparable to *VIRGIL*, I must confess him superior to *LUCAN*, whom he has imitated in the choice of his subject. If he has little of the pathos, few nervous, characteristic speeches; if he is destitute of that exuberant imagery, those bold strokes of fancy, so conspicuous in *HOMER*, *VIRGIL*, *ARISTO*, *TASSO*, and *MILTON*, he is likewise more free from superfluity and extravagance than some of these; and from his animated style, and manly versification, may be read without disgust, if not with pleasure: so that he seems to have been in the right when he says that “versification ought to be the only study of a poet (1).”

(1) *Préf. de la Henriade.*

VII. His other works are adorned with all the graces of style, and a wit which he perpetually displays at the expence of religion, and which, though entirely destitute of novelty, has endeared him to the multitude. Voluminous as he is, he never wrote one solid or instructive piece in any branch of literature or learning; and I can boldly affirm, that, if we examine with impartiality and attention the generality of his writings, we shall find his only design is to make way for ridicule. Though he always tells us that we ought to investigate in history the rise and progress of the arts, and the recesses of the human heart, rather than burden our memory with a collection of dates, and the names of princes and countries; yet instead of presenting us himself with a picture of the heart of MAN, all we find, for the most part, is the heart of VOLTAIRE. Even in his poetical works the philo-
 phical

phical spirit of the writer shines through every character. But after all, as it cannot be denied that there are many curious and interesting anecdotes in the works of this extraordinary genius, it were to be wished that he had taken the trouble to quote his authorities, that the judicious reader might believe what is advanced without resting upon the evidence of one, whose character is rather that of a bel-esprit than a religious observer of truth.

It is pleasant enough to hear him relate, when he comes to the history of modern times, how he has conversed with the friend and confidant of one great man, with the relations of another; how he has been where such and such men lived, who had a principal hand in this or that affair. He thinks to gain credit by referring to these VIVA VOCE authorities, to which it is always difficult,

cult, often impossible, to recur. But why, when he wrote of former ages, did he not mention his written evidence? Perhaps to prevent a discovery of his falsities, or at least variations from the authentic testimony of those who were cotemporary with the facts.

VIII. These reflections are disagreeable but they are necessary; for not to mention how much historical truth suffers when a writer, by relating what he pleases, turns history into romance, it is my fixed opinion that one of the principal causes of the decline of learning is the neglect of this article, though at the same time the other extreme is generally a mark of bad taste. GREEK and LATIN citations thrust into each sentence must disgust every reader of common sense, and can only please a plodding GERMAN. But
on

on the other hand, he who seeks improvement will generally rise from those works which do not sufficiently elucidate the sentiments, or confirm the facts, as ignorant as when he sat down, and at a loss where to apply for better information. I know what the pretence is: they would shun the imputation of pedantry. But will they call RAPIN, BOSSUET, FENELON, FLEURY, MABILLON, DUPIN, ROLLIN, DUBOS, and Abbé RACINE, pedants? These have left us many works sacred and profane, which they have diversified and enriched, without injuring the uniformity and flow of their style, by producing at proper places, the ancient authors to confirm their opinions, and facilitating our recourse to these fathers of genuine literature and solid wisdom. If this is pedantry, I believe the truly learned will glory in the stigma, and with pleasure leave the
reputation

reputation of a PHILOSOPHICAL SPIRIT to the barren abstruseness of those refined writers who would treat morality and the belles-lettres like metaphysical or mathematical problems.

IT is to be wished that VOLTAIRE, whose perspicuity is undeniable, had thought proper to mention the authors from whom he has so freely borrowed, and had published his reflections upon the various branches of literature, which are in general just, in compleat books, rather than detached letters, prefaces, and essays. By acting otherwise, he has doubly served his own interest, doubly injured that of the republic of letters. I cannot allow myself to think that he intended to impose his sentiments upon the world as original, though there are many suspicious circumstances against him; but he certainly found it much easier to express
 whatever

whatever occurred to him, or that he had formerly read, than to compose a regular work, and store it with the proper authorities. Besides, he well knew that modern readers, allured by the poignancy of a satirical style, are satisfied if they can pick up a smart expression to retail out in conversation, without examining the propriety of the sentiment. Thus is every fountain of literature abandoned, study reduced to mere curiosity, and the observation justified that “now-a-days we read only for amusement.

IX. To those who would estimate the state of literature from the number of its followers, I shall only mention that in ROME there were more men of letters under DOMITIAN than under AUGUSTUS: yet who would hesitate in forming an opinion of the literary merit of these ages? This truth, so fully illustrated by Mr. HUME in his Essay

OF

OF NATIONAL CHARACTERS, would appear incredible were we not to observe the causes of it. When the belles-lettres have once flourished, a spirit of emulation soon renders them universal. Books growing daily more numerous, grow daily worse; since authors, neglecting nature, copy from their predecessors, or affecting singularity, deviate from the true path. But as publications encrease, the difficulty of literary success encreases likewise; for if it is unnecessary to read the bad, yet some labour is requisite to discover the good. Let it be further considered that as books multiply, indolence and luxury prevail. The conveniences of life have always been the fore-runners and attendants of polite literature. DEMOSTHENES, PLATO, XENOPHON, SOPHOCLES, flourished in GREECE; CICERO, CÆSAR, LIVY, VIRGIL, HORACE, in ROME, when success in war and commerce had introduced magnificence and politeness.

liteness. When ALEXANDER the sixth, and JULIUS the second had enlarged and secured the papal power in ITALY, the fine arts were soon cultivated in the glorious pontificate of LEO X. The popes and other potentates could not be supposed to attend to literature, or patronise genius, while their thoughts were wholly turned upon recovering or establishing their dominions. History shews us the condition of the FRENCH monarchy before FRANCIS the first, and even for an age after, till RICHELIEU abolished the feudal power, and that ferocity of manners which sprung from it as from a seminary of war. In the reign of HENRY the third, scarcely were coaches known in PARIS. The houses were like castles or prisons, and the whole tenor of their life must necessarily have been of a piece. Nor could it then have been imagined that they would ever attain that elegance, politeness, and taste, which afterwards prevailed in the age
of

of LEWIS the fourteenth. But human affairs are in a perpetual flux; urbanity and splendor, as I have already more than once had occasion to observe, naturally degenerate into luxury and effeminacy, as literature begins to decline. The ATHENIANS were never so dissolute as in the age of DEMETRIUS PHALEREUS, from whom the corruption of literature took its rise; nor the ROMANS as when SENECA and LUCAN depraved the public taste in the reign of CALIGULA and NERO. SENECA himself, and after him ROLLIN (10), have well observed that the manners of a people have a great influence upon literature. Thus luxury enervates composition, and necessarily occupies many of those hours which ought to be devoted to study. Yet the ambition of literary fame still continues; and we relinquish the study of the ancients for more

(10) Rollin des belles-lettres; reflexions sur le gout.

compendious methods of instruction. We are instantly accommodated with compilations, which may satisfy the indolent lovers of brevity, though they require no great exertions of genius, imagination, or industry. The press teems with essays, compends, journals, encyclopædias, and other works of the same kind; all of which may serve to convey a smattering of knowledge, but obstruct, instead of facilitating, the progress of true learning. We may safely conclude then that taste may be upon the verge of destruction, though men of letters seemingly abound; and Abbé RACINE was in the right when he said (11), “ L’esprit devient commun, quand
 “ le génie devient rare : ” authorlings swarm as men of real genius disappear.

X. I would not be thought to derogate from the reputation of the present FRENCH

[(11) Réflexions sur la poésie. chap. 11.

literati, some of whom are as great an honour to their country as were the most eminent of the age of LEWIS the fourteenth. The sciences, particularly natural philosophy, medicine and the mathematics, have been enriched by new discoveries and observations, and handled with greater perspicuity and elegance than before. Whatever opposition BUFFON's Natural History may have met with, the style is certainly noble and perspicuous, and in this respect will be always universally admired. Yet it must be confessed that a too close attachment to the sciences cannot fail to retard the more polite studies, as they introduce a habit of philosophical precision, and of course dryness and sterility, into works of taste. "That philosophical spirit," says M. D'ALEMBERT, "so fashionable
 " now-a-days, which would know every
 " thing and suppose nothing, has even in-
 " fected the belles-lettres. This, it is said,

“ hurts their progress, and would it could
 “ be denied !”

I SHALL not presume to decide whether greater advantage redounds to society from the demonstrative sciences, or from the liberal arts and the belles-lettres. It is sufficient for me that I have shewn the error of those who contend that literature is in a better condition at present than in the last century. To conclude this subject, I shall transcribe a passage from the celebrated Abbé LE BLANC. (12) “ We have renounced,” says he, “ the
 “ true models of composition, and adopted
 “ such as are altogether repugnant to sound
 “ taste. What befel the ROMANS has
 “ likewise befallen us. We are no longer
 “ delighted with nature ; the beautiful, the
 “ majestic, the simple, disgust us. Like
 “ those whose vitiated palates can only be

(12) Lettres d'un François, Let. 43.

“ affected

“ affected by strong liquors, we require
 “ sallies of wit and fancy, ingenious de-
 “ scriptions, brilliant strings of points and
 “ antitheses. In a word, we are so intent
 “ upon the superstructure, that we neglect
 “ the foundation. The taste of our mo-
 “ dern preachers and architects is much the
 “ same. Our sermons are witty, though
 “ void of eloquence ; our buildings over-
 “ charged with ornaments, though the ar-
 “ chitecture is naught. True orators have
 “ always considered this affectation of plea-
 “ santry as beneath the dignity of their pro-
 “ fession. The eloquence of a modern
 “ dazzles, that of a CICERO, of a BOSSUET,
 “ enlightens.

“ OUR poetry is nearly in the same condi-
 “ tion : we have still many good verses, but
 “ how few good poems ! If a composition
 “ is but witty, it pleases, as if we knew not

“ that excess is always faulty. We are weak
“ enough to imagine we have more wit than
“ our predecessors of the last century. For
“ the truth of this the ladies will refer you
“ to the writings in the age of LEWIS the
“ fourteenth. Yet, strange as it may appear, I
“ will venture to assert that this very flow of
“ wit, so predominant at present, is perhaps
“ an effect of our want of it. To impose on
“ the world, we take every opportunity of
“ displaying our all; whereas the authors of
“ the preceding century, sure of pleasing,
“ displayed only what was necessary. They
“ knew what they possessed, and they knew
“ how to make a proper use of it. The
“ former are to the latter what a petty shop-
“ keeper is to an extensive trader. The
“ one, to allure customers, is obliged to
“ exhibit his whole stock; the other, certain
“ of giving satisfaction, only exhibits what is
“ necessary to point out his profession. The
“ moderate

“ moderate use which RACINE and BOILEAU
 “ made of their wit is equally a proof of
 “ their wisdom and superiority. They ac-
 “ quired this noble simplicity by imitating
 “ the authors of the AUGUSTAN age. Such
 “ was the character of VIRGIL, of TULLY,
 “ of LIVY: but their successors, however
 “ ingenious, were tainted with the abuses
 “ which had crept into literature. TA-
 “ CITUS’s only aim seems to have been sin-
 “ gularity of expression. That grandeur
 “ which appears in SENECA was entirely
 “ owing to embellishment, and his affec-
 “ tation of sublimity shews that it was not
 “ natural to him (1). Yet unhappily these
 “ are the favourite authors now-a-days.

(1) I cannot help differing from M. LE BLANC when he
 places TACITUS in the same light with SENECA. They
 not only flourished at different periods, but the solidity and
 strength of TACITUS’s style is altogether unlike the bril-
 liant sophistry of SENECA.

“ We hunt for wit, we interlard our elo-
 “ quence with it, and our taste is debased, in
 “ proportion as we depart from those happy
 “ times when FRANCE carried all the arts
 “ to the highest point of perfection.

“ Confess then, Sir, that we have already
 “ wandered so far that, without a speedy
 “ return, we shall run the risk of being ir-
 “ recoverably lost. What great need have
 “ we of a QUINTILIAN to guide us !”

THUS reasons M. LE BLANC; and I shall only add an observation of ATTERBURY, the celebrated bishop of ROCHESTER. While in disgrace at the court of GEORGE the first, he resided at PARIS; and being upon a journey from thence, in the year 1729, to meet his daughter, he remarks in a letter to his friend Mr. POPE (1), that he

(1) See Pope's letters.

had found more good taste in the southern parts of FRANCE than in PARIS. Far from doubting this circumstance, I rather think it a natural effect of the vicissitude of literature. A taste for the fine arts, like every other fashion, originally appears in the metropolis, and afterwards gradually becomes general; nay it often happens that what has already ceased to be the taste in town has hardly reached the country. When the belles-lettres had attained perfection in PARIS we cannot therefore suppose them so far advanced in the other cities of FRANCE. But as this taste, this perfection in the fine arts, is ever fluctuating, no sooner is it diffused through the provinces, by the illustrious works issuing from the capital, than the source begins to be corrupted. Luxury, effeminacy and dissipation, which contribute so much to destroy useful learning, and are always the attendants of af-

festation, excessive refinement, a love of novelty, and a detestation of the beautiful simplicity of nature in works of taste, are introduced into the capital when the other parts of the nation have just attained perfection. Those then who have a less early acquaintance with writers of eminence, are likewise less early infected by the bad example of innovators. Now ATTERBURY went from PARIS to the south of FRANCE twelve or fifteen years after the death of LEWIS XIV. when the corruption had not as yet seized the more remote parts of the kingdom. It may even happen that an author will influence one province and not another. Thus one of the reasons why the TUSCAN literature flourished in the seventeenth century so much more than that of any other province in ITALY, may perhaps be that TASSO, from whom the decline of ITALIAN literature,

literature, in some measure, proceeded, was never so much admired in FLORENCE, owing perhaps to his controversy with the academy DELLA CRUSCA.

C H A P. X.

I. II. *Of the ENGLISH literature—its rise.*

III. *The first æra of the ENGLISH language and poetry in the reign of EDWARD III.*

IV. *Of the writers who flourished under Queen ELIZABETH.* V. VI. VII. *The*

vicissitudes and progress of literature under her successors. VIII. IX. *Its golden age*

under Queen ANNE. X. *Why it has retained its vigour longer in ENGLAND than in*

other countries. XI. *Character of the ENGLISH writers.* XII. XIII. *Advantages*

which they enjoy from the constitution of the government. XIV. *Of the liberty of the*

press. XV. *Of criticism.* XVI. *Observations upon the uncertainty of the ENGLISH*

language. XVII. *Of the education of the nobility.*

IT is now time to enquire if ENGLAND, at present so famous both for the liberal and other arts, has been subjected to the same literary revolutions which we have observed in other nations. Though taste revived at the same period in ENGLAND as in FRANCE, yet in the former it was at the height of vigour, when in the latter it evidently tended to decay. Nay it is many years since the practice of translating and studying ENGLISH books, without the smallest choice, has become the principal employment of the FRENCH, which some of their first writers have greatly lamented (1).

BUT before I proceed, let me, by an open declaration, anticipate those readers who

(1) Quelle est la fureur de nos écrivains François de traduire les ouvrages Anglois sans aucun discernement !

DES FONT.

may

may perhaps be astonished at my boldness in thus characterising the literature of so many different nations.

To point out the causes of the revolutions of literature, would be a task rather curious than useful, if it did not at the same time tend to discover its true and proper character. Now this character appears when we find that any particular style has been universally applauded, and its opposite condemned. For it is impossible that that should be improper, which has been adopted by the most admired authors of every different nation, which was perhaps introduced by the GREEKS, imitated by the ROMANS, and, after a long space of time, revived by the ITALIANS, FRENCH, ENGLISH, and SPANIARDS. All these wrote generally in the same style, yet sometimes, it is true, they varied. It is therefore to be considered,

considered, when particular authors or nations deviate, whether they are proper objects of applause and imitation, or of censure and avoidance. For this purpose, when I observe any literary defect, I always endeavour to follow the most judicious and experienced critics of the nation where the corruption appears; well knowing how difficult it is to attain so critical an acquaintance with foreign languages as to form a proper judgment of their authors.

To trace the rise of literature in ENGLAND we must turn back to an early period, as some of the principal ENGLISH poets preceded those of FRANCE by many years, though letters revived in both countries nearly at the same time: and my only reason for placing FRANCE before ENGLAND was the decline of taste in the former, when in the latter it had just attained perfection.

AT

AT the same time that in ITALY LEO the tenth and PAUL the third, and in FRANCE FRANCIS the first, encouraged literature by their bounty; HENRY the eighth, in the beginning of his reign, was equally favourable to the learned, equally dear to the republic of letters. LUDOVICUS VIVES and ERASMUS, whom I have already celebrated as the principal restorers of taste in EUROPE, lived some time in ENGLAND under that prince; and by the patronage of queen ELIZABETH, and the works of BACON and SHAKESPEARE, letters soon after became firmly established. BACON, so deservedly famous for those seeds of science, which he so liberally diffused, and which afterwards produced so abundant an harvest, was likewise of singular advantage to literature. He was among the first who wrote upon serious subjects in the vulgar language, which, after incredible alterations, began in his days to
assume

assume a form little different from what it still retains.

III. TILL now ENGLAND had produced no writer superior to CHAUCER, who died about the year 1400, and flourished under EDWARD III. and RICHARD II. The signal victories which the former obtained over the SCOTS and FRENCH had introduced plenty and magnificence. There were in the court of that monarch, besides ENGLISH and foreign noblemen, three powerful sovereigns (1). So happy, so glorious a reign could not fail to promote, together with the other arts, the study of poetry and the ENGLISH tongue, though for no other purpose but to amuse and adorn the court. EDWARD certainly wished it (2),

(1) Rapin hist. d'Angleterre lib. 10.

(2) Ibid. lib. 10. sect. 1.

since he abolished the use of the FRENCH or NORMAN tongue in the public acts, the pleadings of the lawyers and the judicial determinations, and substituted the natural language of the country. The men of letters too about this period began to improve it. RICHARD FITZ-RALPH, archbishop of ARMAGH, and JOHN of TREVISA, both famous for their controversies with the regulars, translated the bible and many other books into ENGLISH (1). But these translations would have been insufficient to establish the language, had not the poems of CHAUCER and GOWER appeared. The former has been called the DANTE of ENGLAND. Their subjects, however, can admit of no comparison, as those of CHAUCER rather resemble the licentiousness and irreligion of BOCCACE than the sober majesty of

(1) Rapin hist. d'Angleterre lib. 10. sect. 2.

DANTE;

DANTE; and his style that of CINO DA PISTOIA, GUITTON d'AREZZO, or some more ancient ITALIAN, since DANTE is not so obsolete as CHAUCER, whose language has long been in disuse. Be this as it may, CHAUCER certainly first taught his countrymen to write ENGLISH, and enriched the language by introducing words from the PROVENÇAL, then the most noble and polished dialect of any in EUROPE (1).

IV. YET for about an hundred years he was followed by no author of any name. At last, however, in the reign of queen ELIZABETH, many prose-writers appeared, as BACON and RALEIGH; many poets, as FAIRFAX and SPENCER, who are still looked upon as no inconsiderable masters of the

(1) Chaucer first adorned and amplified our barren tongue from the Provençal, which was then the most polished of all the moderns. DRYDEN,

language.

language. (2). A liturgy too was drawn up, and the bible translated, by authority, the style of which is excellent, though perhaps not altogether modern. The comedies of BEN JONSON, who was cotemporary with SPENCER, are greatly valued, and some of them still acted with applause. But none of the authors of this period have been more extolled than SHAKESPEARE; none have done more honour or more hurt to the ENGLISH drama. Endued by nature with astonishing fire, a most sublime genius, a most fertile imagination, with every requisite to form a great poet; had he had some great rival to contend with, a RICHELIEU, or an academy to censure him, he would undoubtedly have equalled the glory of SOPHOCLES and CORNEILLE. But with this exquisite genius for tragedy, he was entirely ignorant

(1) Spencer and Fairfax, great masters in our language.

DRYDEN.

of

of the dramatic laws ; and a reader of any taste cannot but admire how so happy a vein, so luxuriant a fancy, could subsist with so remarkable a deficiency of judgment and propriety. In the same play we are often presented with the lowest comedy and the most sublime tragedy : we are presented in the same scene with kings, captains, monks, priests, buffoons, and clowns. So far was he from observing even the unities (though so absolutely necessary to carry on the delusion) that he scrupled not to entitle one of his pieces, “ The LIFE and DEATH of “ KING JOHN ” and to tell us that “ the “ scene is sometimes in ENGLAND and some- “ times in FRANCE.” But the generality of his audience knew as little, perhaps, of dramatic composition as himself, and were pleased with this monstrous union of dissimilar characters (1). On the other hand, if

(1) Pope's preface to Shakespeare

we may believe his advocates, he only complied with the taste of the people, from whose approbation, not from that of the learned, he procured a subsistence. His faults withheld not the public applause, and his name gained such influence as to banish almost entirely for two centuries, from the ENGLISH theatre, that good taste which prevailed in other countries. For although many judicious critics in ENGLAND have highly censured the extravagances of SHAKESPEARE and his imitators, yet they have not been able to root out the strong prejudices in his favour; since the tragedians who have written according to the rules, have been generally found barren and frigid, compared with him, and destitute of that genius and fancy which inchant us in SHAKESPEARE. Hence have so many imagined it impossible to succeed without sacrificing the laws of the drama; hence have been perpetuated

petuated those absurdities on the ENGLISH theatre, which are condemned not only by foreigners, but by ADDISON and other ENGLISH critics, blessed with a better taste. Time has so strongly confirmed this prejudice, that the author of CARACTACUS, and almost all who choose to follow the purer models of antiquity, have relinquished the theatre, and the applauses of the multitude, for the solid approbation of the learned. Thus does eminence give a sanction to every species of corruption, and especially to those of letters. But SHAKESPEARE was singularly fatal to the ENGLISH literature, as he flourished in its infancy; whereas, in other nations, corruption did not begin, till taste had attained maturity.

V. VI. VII. THE belles-lettres, though far short of perfection, were certainly cultivated with great success under ELIZABETH,
and

and were therefore soon tainted with the corruptions usually consequent on a successful age, with points of wit and antitheses. These were remarkably fashionable under JAMES the first, the successor of ELIZABETH. That monarch himself frequently used them, and seldom created a bishop or privy counsellor who had not signalised himself by some witticism or conceit. At other times they had been admitted into works of humour; but now, under the protection of the sovereign, they mounted the pulpit, and made their appearance in council. The most eminent authors adopted them in their serious compositions. The sermons of bishop ANDREWS, and the tragedies of SHAKESPEARE are full of them. The former exhorted sinners to repentance in a pun, the latter thought nothing of introducing a hero melting into tears, which he would accompany with contrasts and points for perhaps a dozen

dozen of lines. This is the idea ADDISON gives us of the literati after queen ELIZABETH.

BUT the progress of solid literature, as well as of these corruptions, was retarded by the civil wars in the reign of the unfortunate CHARLES I. Fanaticism, which is no less incompatible with the belles-letters than barbarism and ignorance, and the religious controversies, which were then started and continued with so much fury under CROMWELL, equally debased the sentiment and style, and destroyed the natural propriety of the ENGLISH language, as the affectation of grecisms had done that of the FRENCH in the days of RONSARD. The peaceful reign of CHARLES II. gave the court leisure and opportunity for the politer studies; but these were licentious as the manners of the age. The satires of the earl of ROCHESTER, the duke of BUCKINGHAM, and some other

poets of that period abound with all the obscenity and invective of which poetry is capable. This taste continued even in later times, so that ADDISON might justly say, the ENGLISH satire "is nothing but ribaldry and billingsgate" (1).

POETRY was, however, greatly ennobled in this reign by the united efforts of MILTON, WALLER, and DRYDEN. Yet the former, far from being a favourite at court, lived miserable and neglected, without so much as enjoying the reward of his labours, his poem and reputation remaining almost unknown till after his death. A great poem, as MILTON's *Paradise Lost*, notwithstanding the objections of the critics, certainly is, ought to enrich, and as it were, authorise the language in which it is written;

(1) *Spectator* No. 451.

for it is the merit of the work that usually fixes a value upon the style, and very seldom will a book, however elegantly written, attain celebrity, if void of intrinsic worth. Yet the epic poets of other nations have the advantage of MILTON in this respect. The style for example, of HOMER, VIRGIL, ARISTO, and TASSO, has ever been more highly esteemed than that of the ENGLISH poet; who though he wrote in the reign of CHARLES the second, when the language was considerably improved, yet from his connections with the world, in the turbulent times of CHARLES I. and CROMWELL, he contracted an obscurity of style, embarrassed with harsh, obsolete expressions, and scholastic terms, occasioned by the violent disputes, civil and religious, which then prevailed. Hence likewise those vestiges of the fanaticism which enflamed him, when, as a member of the parliament, and a minister of

CROMWELL, he inveighed against his sovereign and the church.

IT is besides very probable that he retained some of the rust of FAIRFAX, whose poetical son he has been called, as WALLER was of SPENCER. But whether the style of SPENCER is more refined than that of FAIRFAX, or whether a court-life was the cause, certain it is that the style of WALLER is much more modern than that of MILTON. WALLER, like the FRENCH MALHERBE, brought his native language and poetry to its present form. The ENGLISH call him the father of their poetry; and FENTON affirms that ENGLAND is more obliged to WALLER than FRANCE is to RICHELIEU and the whole academy. He is indeed the PETRARCH, the MALHERBE of ENGLAND, if not superior to both, as he had the address to adopt from that fluctuating medley of words,

words, introduced under the protectorship of CROMWELL, such only as he knew to be suited to the genius of the language, and least liable to disuetude. Time has justified his choice, few, if any, of his expressions having as yet become obsolete; though both he and PETRARCH were mistaken in supposing that their writings in the mother-tongue would be disregarded by posterity. WALLER constantly complained of his native language, and lamented the condition of those who wrote in it: yet his own ENGLISH poems are in the highest repute, and had they been in LATIN would have been now equally neglected with the AFRICA and BUCOLICS of PETRARCH.

AT the same time flourished DRYDEN, a poet of still greater name than WALLER, and equally a reformer of the ENGLISH poetry and language. Endless were the disputes

he had to maintain with wretched critics and malicious enemies. The poet indeed ended his life in misery, but his works have triumphed over their machinations, and there are perhaps none more universally admired. POPE, who had just seen him (*VIRGILIUM VIDI TANTUM*, says he, in a letter to his friend WYCHERLY) always speaks of him in the most respectful terms, with a sort of filial affection, and represents him as the grand support of poetry.

THE number and excellence of the authors that immediately succeeded DRYDEN and WALLER, whom they admired and studied, evince how conducive their works have been to form the ENGLISH taste: since if we except SPENCER, SHAKESPEARE, and MILTON, few before DRYDEN are now usually read.

VIII. IX. THE reign of queen ANNE then, about the begining of which DRYDEN died, ought to be considered as the golden age of ENGLISH literature. Then flourished CONGREVE, equal in comedy to JONSON and DRYDEN; and GAY, whose fables are thought to be no wise inferior to those of PHÆDRUS and FONTAINE. Then PHILIPS and POPE distinguished themselves in pastoral, though in a different manner; and the latter, who is undoubtedly the most judicious and elegant, perhaps the most nervous and sublime, poet that ever ENGLAND produced, was no less successful in satiric, mock-heroic, and didactic poetry. ADDISON was an elegant prose-writer, and, in criticism, by no means inferior to POPE. His essays in the Spectator have been particularly admired, and his dramatic writings do more honour to the national taste than those of SHAKESPEARE. SWIFT was an accurate critic,

an elegant prose-writer, and an agreeable lyric, though his wit was too luxuriant, a fault for which COWLEY likewise was very remarkable.

ATTERBURY, TILLOTSON, SHERLOCK, SHARPE, BARROW, and many others, at different periods, distinguished themselves in the pulpit, equally with BOSSUET, BOURDALOUE, MASSILLON and ARNAULD. Philosophy and politics were handled by many great men, particularly my lord BOLINGBROKE who, though supposed a sceptic from the pernicious maxims he inculcates in his study of history, was so much esteemed for his genius, learning, and taste, that POPE, who was a Roman catholic, and a poet incapable of flattery, makes him the highest eulogium a man of letters could desire (1).

(1) Essay on Man, ep. 4. towards the end.

"COME then, my friend! my genius!

"come along;

“ Oh master of the poet, and the song !

“ And while the muse now stoops, or now

“ascends,

“ To man’s low passions, or their glorious

"ends,

“ Teach me, like thee, in various nature wise,

“ To fall with dignity, with temper rise ;

“ Form'd by thy converse happily to steer

“ From grave to gay, from lively to severe :

“ Correct with spirit, eloquent with ease,

“ Intent to reason, or polite to please.

“ Oh! while along the stream of time, thy

“ name

“ Expanded flies, and gathers all its fame ;

“ Say, shall my little bark attendant fail,

“ Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale ?

“ When statesmen, heroes, kings, in dust re-

“ pose,

“ Whose sons shall blush their fathers were

“ thy foes,

“ Shall

“ Shall then this verse to future age pretend
 “ Thou wert my guide, philosopher, and
 “ friend ?
 “ That urg’d by thee, I turn’d the tuneful
 “ art
 “ From words to things, from fancy to the
 “ heart.”

I HAVE transcribed this passage, not so much for the encomium upon his illustrious patron, as to observe, that if POPE really learned from him to write as he did, we ought to acknowledge our obligations to my lord BOLINGBROKE for a new species of poetry ; since no poet ever treated a subject so profound as that of the ESSAY ON MAN with a sublimity equal to POPE.

ENGLAND was still inferior in history alone. The earl of CLARENDON indeed
wrote

wrote a celebrated history of the civil wars, but the most of those that are read, even that of ENGLAND itself, are translations from other languages.

IT is observable here, that ADDISON, POPE, BOLINGBROKE, MIDDLETON, M^cLAURIN, and many others authors equally, famous, lived till towards the middle of the present century. Nay ENGLAND can still boast of a MASON, a GRAY, a WARBURTON, and other writers in prose, as well as verse, equally ingenious, learned and elegant. Thus has the state of letters been nearly the same in ENGLAND for these hundred and fifty years, although some characteristic difference may have been observed, and perhaps every thirty or forty years some variation in style. I shall therefore enquire into the causes why that nation has been

hitherto exempted from those corruptions which so soon appear every where else, and of course, point out the peculiar qualities of the ENGLISH literature; since the same reasons which distinguish it from that of other nations, likewise concur, in my opinion, to render its vigour more permanent.

X. ENGLAND is equally remarkable for imitation and original composition. It has been repeatedly said, indeed, that the ENGLISH writers, particularly the poets, are generally indebted to their own imagination; yet it is certain that even the most celebrated have often borrowed from those of other nations. I shall omit MILTON, to avoid entering into the famous accusation raised against him by LAUDER (1), who pretended

(1) Essay on Milton's use and imitation of the moderns in his Paradise Lost. *Journal étranger*, Octobre & Nov. 1754.

that, besides imitating HOMER and VIRGIL, he stole a great deal from the SARCOTIS of father MASSENIUS, and the ADAMUS EXUL of GROTIUS. It is, remarkable, however, and to their honour I speak it, that even DRYDEN, POPE, and SWIFT, poets equally eminent with MILTON, in their respective walks, not only laid down the ancients for their models, but were always proud to acknowledge themselves imitators. DRYDEN generally prefixed his author's name, as OVID or VIRGIL, BOCCACE or CHAUCER: and POPE not only entitled many of his satires, EPISTLES IN IMITATION of HORACE, but when he had composed the DUNCIAD, a mock-heroic poem in a taste entirely new, he intreated a friend (1) to mention, in a subsequent edition, such passages as had been occasionally taken from the ancients. It

(1) Pope's letters.

must be confessed, indeed, that POPE made no great use of these in his ESSAY ON MAN; yet this is nothing more than a versification of the system of LEIBNITZ, as LUCRETIVS's poem is of that of EPICURUS.

XI. AGAIN, if we consider the ENGLISH poets separately we shall find reason to conclude that those pieces which are most remarkably fraught with the beauties of poetry, and universally admired, are chiefly imitations of the ancients; and likewise that their original pieces have been often severely censured; in which respect it is that the judicious ADDISON was obliged to confess that the taste of most of the ENGLISH poets, as well as readers, is extremely gothic (1). We have already observed that the principal defects of SHAKESPEARE proceeded from his

(1) Spect, n. 62.

neglect, or rather ignorance, of the ancient dramatists, his wanton indulgence of an exuberant fancy, and the genius of the times. In one particular, however, ENGLAND has surpassed all the modern nations with little, if any, assistance from the ancient masters. This is called by DRYDEN, and after him by ADDISON, *the fairy way of writing*, and consists in introducing ideal characters, as Devils, Fairies, Gods, Satyrs, and the like. Thus MILTON is never thought so sublime as when SATAN and BEELZEBUB speak. A certain person, comparing the two heroic poems of this poet, has wittily observed that “ we find MILTON in PARADISE
 “ LOST, and lose him in PARADISE RE-
 “ GAINED.”

To form a just opinion of the ENGLISH poetry, we must attend to the national disposition, since a foreigner will frequently cen-
 sure

sure what a native will highly extol (1). Thus MILTON's allegory of Sin and Death is expressly condemned by VOLTAIRE (2) and RACINE; yet the celebrated ATTERBURY esteemed that the most beautiful part of the poem (3), and maintained that there is nothing in HOMER to compare with it for grandeur and invention, for vivacity and beauty of colouring. RACINE greatly disapproved likewise of his battle of the angels, which ADDISON so highly extols. Perhaps indeed, a prepossession in favour of their poet may deceive the ENGLISH into an implicit admiration of every thing he writes: and I have observed that they are by no means unanimous or uniform in praising those singular strokes which they sometimes so greatly admire.

(1) Racine *Réflexions sur la Poésie.*

(2) Voltaire *essai sur le poëme épique.*

(3) Pope's letters.

XII. XIII. THE form of the ENGLISH government has undoubtedly a very considerable influence upon their literature. Neither GREECE nor ROME, according to Abbé YART, ever afforded so extensive a field for the ode as ENGLAND for these two centuries (1). “The flourishing reign of
 “ queen ELIZABETH” says he, “the tra-
 “ gical death of the queen of SCOTS, the
 “ three crowns united upon the head of
 “ JAMES the first, the fanaticism which
 “ overturned the throne of a great king,
 “ and put him to death upon a scaffold,
 “ the odious, but brilliant, interregnum of
 “ the usurper, the restoration of a lawful
 “ king, the general and excessive jubilee
 “ that attended it, the factions and civil
 “ wars which soon after broke out, might
 “ fill all the muses with enthusiasm.” In-

(1) Discours préliminaire sur l'ode, tom. 3.

deed a poet, by the liberty he has of representing things in what light he pleases, has many opportunities of distinguishing himself upon every subject. Thus WALLER, setting aside the justice of the cause, and considering the actions of CROMWELL only in one point of view, composed an ode in his praise, by no means inferior to that which he and COWLEY afterwards wrote against the same CROMWELL, upon the restoration of CHARLES II.

BUT if the frequency of interesting events in GREAT-BRITAIN affords an extensive field for panegyric as well as satire, the political system of that nation is equally productive of subjects for civil oratory. The important affairs which are determined by vote in the two houses of parliament, not only give the members an opportunity, but even lay them under a necessity, of exercising
their

their eloquence, either to support the interests of a party, or the honour and good of the state: and the present example of a great minister shews that ENGLAND can give birth to a CRASSUS, a HORTENSIUS, a CICERO. ENGLISH oratory, however, has not hitherto attained the same energy and grandeur with that of ROME and other nations. The uniform tone of voice which their orators invariably preserve, without the smallest gesture obliges them to avoid many rhetorical figures, which, unaccompanied with action, would be frigid and unavailing. Pulpit oratory is in the same condition (1). The clergy deliver their sermons with their papers before them, without passion, motionless as a notary reading an instrument, and their discourses, like philosophical exhortations, are calculated rather to convince the understand-

(1) Spectator, No. 59 or 47.

ing than affect the heart. Hence it is that in ENGLAND those sermons are styled eloquent which contain strong and conclusive arguments, as those of SHERLOCK, TILLOTSON, and BARROW, or which are elegantly expressed, as those of ATTERBURY. It cannot be doubted that the protestant religion, particularly the sect of CALVIN, communicates its natural dryness and sterility to the clergy, and prevents that luxuriance which the ROMISH religion, certainly more rich in spiritual and pathetic sentiments, confers upon her pastors. But if the ENGLISH orators have not attained the eloquence and sublimity of foreigners, neither are they in danger of falling into those corruptions, which, in other nations, arise from the abuse of figure and declamation.

XIV. WHAT above all gives a particular character to the ENGLISH literature is the
liberty

liberty of the press, which likewise depends upon the nature of the government. As it is still undecided in ENGLAND whether this liberty is of greater advantage or prejudice to the political system (1), so it is equally doubtful whether it advances or retards the progress of letters. For out of such an infinity of authors of every condition, who print whatever their genius, caprice, passion, or fancy dictate, it is impossible that elegant and ingenious compositions should not appear, perhaps oftener than in other nations; where, genius being more restrained, they publish less trash indeed, but at the same time frequently suppress valuable thoughts from some apprehension of danger, or opposition to the publication of their labours.

To the liberty of the press may be added the convenience of publishing by *subscription*.

(1) Spectator

IN ITALY, for instance, one of the principal difficulties an author has to encounter is the expence of printing; whereas in LONDON, by the friendship of some man of eminence in the literary or activity in the busy world, he may not only raise money enough to defray this charge, but have a considerable sum over. This contributes not a little to promote study and industry, though like the liberty of the press, it often creates negligence, superfluity, indigestion, and insipidity; all of which would be in a great measure prevented if the ENGLISH laboured under those obstacles which give foreigners an opportunity to re-touch their performances when the heat of imagination is abated. Besides, this inevitably produces an inundation of books, which overflowing the land confound the studious, who cannot without trouble distinguish the good from the bad, especially as the most poultry performances

daily

daily appear under the assumed name of some respectable author.

SOMETIMES, likewise, an authors unfinished pieces are made public without his consent. This abuse was carried to such an height that the officers at the post-office are said to have delivered to the printers letters that passed through their hands, which they knew to be written by some famous author, or directed to him by a friend (1). This multitude of books may perhaps have concurred to support the vigour of literature longer in ENGLAND than in other countries. If it be true that the height of corruption succeeds the height of perfection, this is, perhaps, another reason, why the ENGLISH literature is still undecayed. For if we except a very few, even the most renowned

(1) Pope's letters

ENGLISH authors have fallen into defects or excesses, owing partly to those universal prejudices that have long infected certain branches of literature, and which I have already remarked in some kinds of poetry.

NOR is it an easy matter for one or two authors to alter the ENGLISH taste. The constant clash of faction, the predominant spirit of liberty, and the custom of unreservedly criticising every thing that appears, render it almost impossible that any man, however great, should obtain the universal voice of the nation; and though he should have a million of admirers, he would still have some critics to divest him of his undeserved honours.

XV. This is the great advantage of criticism. The faults of an author will never
become

become general while there are critics who dare to condemn them. Had *SENECA* been attacked by a few men of taste, who would not have spared any of his affectations, his example would have been less baneful. But whilst many admired, hardly one censured him; and from what *QUINTILIAN* has said, we may infer that even he durst not attempt it. Thus criticism certainly maintains the vigour of literature, as the *ROMAN* censorship formerly maintained a strict observance of the laws of virtue.

ALL writers, whether good or bad, have the same propensity to censure each other. But truth will at length triumph (1). *MILBOURN* and *BLACKMORE* were unable to discredit *DRYDEN* and *POPE*, notwithstanding their own efforts, and the cabals of their par-

(1) *Pope's Essay on Criticism.*

tisans; and were themselves, like BAVIUS and MÆVIUS under the rod of VIRGIL and HORACE, damned into everlasting contempt and derision. Besides, the emulation and controversies which arise amongst the learned greatly concur to perfect or illustrate particular studies, to support the vigour of literature, and to prevent the reputation of a man of letters from authorising his faults. Thus the jealousy which subsisted between ADDISON and POPE, though disagreeable to their common friends, who could have wished that two such ingenious men had lived in amity, was by no means hurtful to literature. The pastorals of POPE and PHILIPS have their respective beauties, though the poets adopted different modes of composition, which they supported by repeated criticisms and defences. Now though these literary wars have greatly contributed to preserve taste longer uncorrupted in ENG-

LAND

LAND than in any other nation, yet I am apt to think it has been not a little owing to even the uncertainty of the language.

XVI. THE ENGLISH tongue not only varied during the two centuries that intervened between CHAUCER and SPENCER, but even in later times, since ELIZABETH, the alterations have been so remarkable, that WALLER, as has been already observed, was afraid lest his works, from the fluctuating state of the language, would soon be neglected and unintelligible. Nay, in the present age, POPE (1) was of opinion, that his style and that of his cotemporaries would, ere long, sink into disuse.

(1) Now length of fame (our second life) is lost,
And bare threescore is all ev'n that can boast,
Our sons their fathers' failing language see,
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.

Essay on Criticism, v. 480.

IN some respects it is inconvenient when a language alters so often, but not so for writers, especially poets, to whom it affords frequent opportunities to build upon the ruins of their predecessors, and to cultivate, as it were, a new field: no inconsiderable happiness this, when we reflect that the poetical fund has been so long exhausted, and that succeeding poets always appear to disadvantage after the different branches of poetry have been adorned by a few authors of distinguished reputation. Now DRYDEN could not have borrowed from CHAUCER, or POPE from SPENCER, had not their language been then greatly antiquated. No ITALIAN has ever been able to take the subject of a sonnet from PETRARCH, without also taking the words, since our language, especially that of poetry, is still the same. Hence then it may be said that the ENGLISH are equally indebted to their own old writers as to those

of

of other nations; and, which is an advantage peculiar to themselves, may with equal freedom borrow from either.

XVII. AFTER all, I cannot but think that one chief cause of the longevity of ENGLISH literature is the public education of the youth, particularly of those of high rank. In ENGLAND it is usual for the first nobility to attend the public schools and universities, where they are committed, with other boys, to the discretion of a master: a custom highly laudable, since by these means they are indiscriminately subjected to chastisement, and excited by emulation to imbibe a knowledge of the ancient languages, and the principles of solid science. And let people say what they will against this practice, it is impossible to find a man of true literature, who has not applied his mind to what witlings are pleased to term the pedan-

try of the schools. LE PLANC acknowledges, it is from the study of GREEK and LATIN (1) that the learned are more numerous in ENGLAND than in FRANCE, where these languages have been long neglected. But the young nobles promote the culture of letters in another respect, as their example cannot but animate their inferiors to undertake a task, which even peers impose upon their children. Thus learning becomes universal, and produces another advantage still. Authors, who naturally wish to be read and admired by the great, may as readily succeed by writing upon solid and learned subjects as upon those of levity and intrigue. Hence too the ENGLISH literati not only often assist each other (as appears from the letters of SWIFT, POPE, GAY, and ARBUTHNOT, all of whom would with

(1) Lett. 62. d'un François.

pleasure have shared their fortunes together) but are almost certain of the favour and protection of the great. I have seen a letter from the earl of OXFORD, one of the first noblemen of his age, in which he expresses his ambition of being publicly acknowledged as the friend of POPE, SWIFT, PARNEL, and ARBUTHNOT, men infinitely his inferiors in rank, but highly ennobled by their learning.

LITERATURE can never decay when thus patronised by men of birth and power; and this will ever be the case where the noble are educated at the same schools, and under the same restrictions, with the ignoble. Intelligent writers think this of so great importance to the advancement of the fine arts, that POPE says, ignorance will gain ground, without opposition when,

—birch shall blush with noble blood no more.

THE nobility have likewise many strong inducements to study. The constitution of the ENGLISH government is such that, without great accomplishments, it is almost impossible to acquire influence either with the parliament or the people. Besides, the profession of literature is so far from being thought incompatible with the great offices of state that BACON, MILTON, ADDISON, BOLINGBROKE, and other distinguished personages in the literary world, have been raised to the head of affairs. NEWTON was director of the mint; and PRIOR, besides other important employments, was sent in quality of plenipotentiary to the court of FRANCE.

C H A P. XI.

- I. *Reflections upon the progress of literature in SCOTLAND.* II. *Of the modern SCOTCH poets and historians.* III. *Whether it is possible for those to write elegantly, who were neither born nor educated where the language is spoken in its purity.*

SCIENCE and literature have certainly retained their vigour longer in ENGLAND than in any other nation. Yet if we separately consider that part of GREAT BRITAIN which is generally distinguished by the name of ENGLAND we must confess that the symptoms of decay are already apparent. Good writers are by no means so numerous in ENGLAND now as they were thirty years ago. But this deficiency is amply compensated by the illustrious authors who have since sprung up in

SCOTLAND. The SCOTS and ENGLISH form one people, write one language, and by these means foreigners are not so sensible of the decline of genius and literature on this side the TWEED.

SCOTLAND for a long succession of ages had hardly given birth to one author of eminence. In the various and turbulent reign of MARY, when letters were successfully cultivated over all EUROPE, by means of the improvements which they received in the sixteenth century, arose BUCHANNAN; equally famous for the virulence with which, in his history, he has mangled the character of his queen, as for his elegant LATIN poems, particularly his paraphrase of the psalms of DAVID. A man of this cast, however learned, who to flatter a foreign queen could defame his natural sovereign, was unable, as he was unworthy, to im-
plant

plant the seeds of literature in the minds of his countrymen. JAMES the sixth, after he had ascended the throne of ENGLAND, took no care to promote the liberal arts in his native country. A prince, who strove to distinguish himself among the wits of ENGLAND and FRANCE by subtilties and antitheses, was but ill qualified to polish or instruct the unlettered SCOTS. The tumultuous, unhappy reign of CHARLES I. and the puritanical disputes under CROMWELL, could afford no opportunity for the polite studies. CHARLES II. had more particular motives for considering SCOTLAND as a hostile country; and indeed the corrupt, effeminate literature of which he was so fond, was by no means proper to introduce the culture of the fine arts.

OF the many illustrious writers under queen ANNE, there was hardly one a native of

SCOTLAND. In short, two entire centuries had elapsed after the universal restoration of letters, before it was imagined that that nation would ever become eminent for erudition or taste. HUTCHESON, an IRISHMAN, zealous for the advancement of literature, and the generous ARCHIBALD duke of ARGYLE, seem to have been particularly destined by heaven to raise, and bring to maturity, in the cold regions of the north, what had heretofore been foolishly supposed incapable of taking root but in the warmer climes of ASIA MINOR, GREECE, and ITALY. The former, a professor of moral philosophy in the university of GLASGOW, diffused over the whole kingdom by his instructive lectures, and valuable publications, those glorious seeds of philosophy and literature which have since produced such an abundant increase. The latter patronised the ingenious with a bounty worthy

worthy of himself, and paid particular attention to the university of GLASGOW, which has since become one of the most renowned in EUROPE.

THAT spirit of literature which had so nobly animated LONDON, the capital of the island, and the neighbouring provinces, has at length, it would seem, extended itself to the remote corners of BRITAIN. It is, however, an incontestible fact that, of late, the principal ornaments of the BRITISH literature have received their birth and education in SCOTLAND. Mathematics and experimental philosophy have been illustrated by the discoveries, by the perspicuity, accuracy, and elegance of SIMSON, M'LAURIN, FERGUSON, and CULLEN. History likewise, and poetry of every kind, have been cultivated with remarkable success.

II. THOMSON,

II. THOMSON, who excelled both in tragic and didactic poetry, will be one day equally famous as POPE. His *Seasons* are already universally read by the lovers of the muses, and his tragedies almost eclipse the glory which ADDISON had acquired by his *CATO*. The *EPIGONIAD* of WILKIE would have been a valuable poem had it appeared in other days. It is no wonder that his readers are so few, when we consider how well acquainted the ENGLISH are with HOMER, not only in the original, but through the celebrated translation of POPE. The *AVARCHIDE* of LUIGI ALAMANNI is in like manner neglected in ITALY, being like the *EPIGONIAD* too close an imitation of the *ILIAD*.

BLACKLOCK will to posterity appear a fiction as to us he appears a prodigy. It will be thought incredible that a man, blind
from

from his infancy, should acquire a perfect knowledge of the ancient and modern languages, become a great poet, and particularly excel in description. The tragedies of MALLET and HOME have been repeatedly applauded upon the LONDON theatres. Poetry, however, is not the species of literature which the SCOT have most successfully cultivated.

I HAVE already observed that though ENGLAND abounds in good writers of every other kind, she has hardly produced one historian of character. It was reserved for SCOTLAND to supply so material a deficiency. Is there a man of letters in EUROPE unacquainted with the works of HUME? Is there a man of taste who does not read his history with particular admiration? Endued with uncommon abilities, had he not shewn so much eagerness

ness to insinuate his pernicious opinions, he would have escaped the just censures of the religious, added greater weight to his history, and rendered it at once more interesting and spirited. Scepticism is naturally cold and barren, and in works of literature passion is generally preferable to indifference. After all, his defects, whether in point of style, sentiment, or historical fidelity, serve but as foils to his excellencies.

DOCTOR SMOLLET might have proved an admirable historian, had he preferred, as is the duty of every ingenious man, future glory to present gain. But doctor ROBERTSON is above all entitled to immortality for the pains he hath taken to illustrate the history of SCOTLAND. In judgment he has equalled the most renowned historians of any nation, in style surpassed not only his own countrymen,

countrymen, but the most elegant authors in ENGLAND.

III. THOSE who pride themselves on being natives of a metropolis, and vainly imagine that propriety of expression is confined to them, will hardly believe that the SCOTS at present bid fair to outshine the ENGLISH in their own language. Let such, however, reflect that many of the great masters of literature were strangers in those cities which were considered as the seat of the language in which they wrote; nay that many of them came from villages whose only pretensions to fame were that they had produced men of such eminence.

IT were vain to attempt a discovery of the particular places which gave birth to the GREEK authors. Of the LATIN not above
three

three or four were ROMANS. PLAUTUS, and TERENCE, those fathers of the LATIN tongue, were not even ITALIANS; and the elegant PHÆDRUS was a THRACIAN. Every school-boy knows that CICERO was a native of ARPINUM, LIVY of APONUS, a village in the neighbourhood of PADUA, and VIRGIL of another near MANTUA. VERONA, VENUSA, and SULMONA gave to ROME three of her most admired poets, CATULLUS, HORACE, and OVID. As to the modern ITALIANS, if DANTE was born in FLORENCE, which is considered as the seat of the ITALIAN language, PETRARCH was a native of AREZZO, where his parents, miserable exiles, had fixed a temporary abode: and though he must have lived but a very short time in TUSCANY, yet in elegance of style he not only surpassed DANTE, who was his predecessor, but every other ITALIAN that
has

has since appeared. BOCCACE, the prince of ITALIAN literature, was born in CERTALDO, an obscure village of TUSCANY. MAROT, and MALHERBE, the first great masters of the FRENCH language, were both natives of provincial cities. Nay the former was not a FRENCHMAN but a FLEMING; and VAUGELAS, who so greatly improved the same language, was a SAVOYARD. But let us leave it to the curious to decide, whether, amongst the names celebrated in history, for their knowledge in the sciences and fine arts, there are more who have derived their origin from great cities or obscure villages. Suffice it to observe that it is not only possible but common for provincial authors to write with purity. If the natives of a capital express themselves with greater ease, the others by studying the genius of the language, and weighing the
force

force and propriety of the words, frequently attain greater accuracy, and a more manly elocution. They are besides less liable to corruptions and foreign idioms, which, from the concourse of various nations, gain an easy admittance into the metropolis.

FOR these and other reasons, which it were needless to enumerate, it ought not to appear strange, that the SCOTS should at present carry off the palm of literature. Nay it is probable that IRELAND might become the seat of science and literature, if luxury, which is said to be carried to a greater height in DUBLIN than even in LONDON, were not an insuperable bar to the progress of taste. Yet the example of USHER, SWIFT, BERKELEY, HUTCHESON, and several

veral others, is a proof that the IRISH are capable of equalling any of the northern nations in erudition and elegance, in criticism and philosophy.

C H A P. XII.

- I. *Of the GERMAN literature. Whether wars retard the progress of the belles-lettres.* II. *Of some famous GERMAN writers, particularly poets.*

IF we turn our eyes towards GERMANY, a new field of curious and important observation will present itself, and convince us that the fine arts take root and flourish equally amid the commotions of war as in the profound tranquillity of peace. Is this a merciful dispensation of Providence to recompense mankind for the numberless evils of war, by the soothing pleasures of the liberal arts?—does it proceed from a natural instinct inclining us to fly from tumult and calamity to ease and recreation?—or, to adopt the mystic language of the heathens,
does

does the same power preside over the desolating operations of war and the inactive pursuit of letters? It is certain, however, that war affords subjects for historians, orators and poets, capable of all the pomp of language, and all the flowers of rhetoric. And perhaps that languor which ever attends a camp, when the army is not in immediate action, animates the officers to the study of poetry; whilst those who, either from their peculiar situation in life, or from timidity, choose not to expose themselves to the dangers of the field, are often prompted to the pursuit of glory in the unwarlike labours of the closet; and these very commotions frequently rouse a spirit of literature, which, in peace, might have been depressed by luxury, a more fatal destroyer than the sword. Be that as it will, experience shews that war, far from diminishing, rather increases the lustre of literature. Hardly was

ATHENS

ATHENS delivered from the ruinous PELOPONESIAN war, when her theatre was enriched by the tragedies of SOPHOCLES and EURIPEDES ; when the history of THUCYDIDES, and the dialogues of PLATO appeared ; when DEMOSTHENES thundered with all the powers of elocution from the forum. The greatest ornaments of the ROMAN language flourished during the most bloody wars which that nation ever sustained ; and we have already seen that the universal peace under AUGUSTUS corresponded with the first corruptions of literature. If we turn our eyes to the history of JULIUS II. and CLEMENT VII. the one predecessor of LEO X. the other of Paul III. if we observe the reign of FRANCIS I. the astonishing wars of LEWIS XIV. we shall immediately discover whether long and bloody hostilities have advanced or retarded the progress of the arts. We must not, however, rashly conclude

clude that every war has the same happy effects, or that even the most prosperous are always productive of improvement in science without the concurrence of other favourable circumstances. Those which must be attended with the utter destruction of one of the contending parties are certainly no wise favourable to literature. Who ever imagined that the war which XERXES carried into GREECE in the days of THEMISTOCLES, the irruption of the GAULS into ROME, the second PUNIC war, the invasion of ITALY by the HUNS and GOTHs, of ENGLAND by the NORMANS, of FRANCE by the ENGLISH, could give birth to, or cherish, a spirit of literature in ATHENS, ITALY, ENGLAND, or FRANCE? When wars have this effect, the dispute must not be for existence, but for glory: NON UTER SIT, SED UTER IMPERET. Those who have a genius for the fine arts, unless their faculties are be-

numbed by an universal want of books, or some such circumstance, will then be forwarded, instead of obstructed, in their course.

FOR upwards of two hundred years, GERMANY had acquired a great reputation for learning of every kind, and for works, excellent as an unwearied application, and a strong, acute genius could make them. PUFFENDORF, HEINECCIUS, LEIBNITZ, VOSSIUS, and an infinity of others less famous, have not only immortalised themselves by illustrations of the civil law, and the laws of nature and of nations, but have likewise discovered an uncommon knowledge of all the branches of philosophy and the belles-lettres. Yet most of these wrote in LATIN: and indeed there are few, even of those whose genius led them to poetry and works of taste, who did not adopt that language.

guage. Twenty years ago GERMANY could boast of no poems in the vulgar language superior to those of GOTTSCHED and SCHOONAIK, enormous and extravagant as they are; yet at present that nation bids fair to rival the most accomplished of EUROPE. KLOPSTOCK and GESSNER, both endued with a genius wonderfully adapted to add novelty and grandeur to the most barren and trite subjects, intended, it would appear, to shew the world, the former in his MESSIAH, the latter in his DEATH OF ABEL, that, while philosophers have employed the sacred fountains of wisdom to subvert morality and religion, poets, though so long accustomed to treat of the passions and follies of men, could likewise adorn the eternal truths of religion, and lead the muses to its defence. Whoever reads the MESSIAH, will be more and more convinced that it is the new clothing of sentiments, however com-

mon, which often constitutes the merit of a work ; and that he who, like VIRGIL, can new-model, and embellish with elegant versification, the inventions of another, justly deserves the reputation of an excellent, an original poet. Many authors have written the life of JESUS CHRIST. Of these SANAZZARO and VIDA, about two centuries ago, and TRUVERI, of late, have left celebrated poems upon that subject, the two former in LATIN, the latter in ITALIAN ; yet is the MESSIAH undeniably an original composition : and the DEATH OF ABRAHAM (a tragedy, of which the great author of OEDIPUS COLONÆUS, HERCULE'S FURIOSUS, and AJAX FLAGELLIFER might be proud) would alone render the name of KLOPSTOCK immortal.

GESSNER's pastorals are already famous, and in my opinion his DEATH of ABEL

is equally admirable. Indeed this pathetic and sublime poem appears to have a dangerous tendency, since it affects the reader with a certain compassion for the disgraced CAIN, whom he represents as impelled to commit the execrable fratricide, rather by some fatal violence upon his mind, than by voluntary malice.

III. WERE I to compose a GERMAN library, I should find numbers highly commendable in every species of poetry. How might I dwell upon HALLER, who with an immense knowledge in medicine, philosophy, and the mathematics, possesses the reputation of an ingenious, a sublime and moral poet; and appears at once to have equalled POPE and BOERHAAVE, the two grand luminaries of the present age! I should find a RABENER to rival SWIFT, the LUCIAN of ENGLAND; an UZ, renowned in the ode; a

GELLERT, who has been deservedly styled the **TERENCE** of **GERMANY**; a **KLEIST**, whose **SPRING** is a master-piece of picturesque poetry. How might I dwell upon **LESSING**, equally famed for criticism and poetry ! But it is not my intention to enter into a minute comparison of the **GERMAN** writers ; if I did, I might, perhaps, wrong those whom I would most commend, since it cannot be supposed that I am sufficiently acquainted with their compositions, most of which are so recently published that the authors are still alive, and those pieces which will gain them greatest honour with posterity perhaps still in embryo. It is reserved, therefore, for others to form a more certain character of their merits ; though I may boldly affirm that their success will ever be in proportion as they imitate nature and the ancients. The most renowned authors would never have attained so great perfection had they not followed
these

these models : and if it is true that the GERMANS have endeavoured chiefly to imitate the modern FRENCH and ENGLISH, as indeed it appears, the critics have great reason to fear that they will never equal other nations in works of taste.

CONCLUSION.

THUS have I brought my account of the literature of various nations down to the present time. It may be expected, therefore, that I should now proceed to its present state in ITALY ; since that abuse of figure and conceit which embarrassed the style of our fathers has been for many years extirpated, and we now equal, if not surpass, the most celebrated authors of the sixteenth century. The sciences, improved and illustrated by many discoveries, are treated more naturally, and at the same time with greater propriety

propriety and accuracy, than heretofore: history, eloquence, and poetry, especially dramatic, have been successfully cultivated by following the writers of antiquity, and perhaps too those of FRANCE. I have reasons, however, for declining a minute examination of this matter: it may afford subject for another work, and is altogether unnecessary to compleat the present.

MY plan was to lay down the causes why the productions of certain ages have been superior to those of others; by a due observance of which men of literary genius may avoid the faults of bad writers, and by imitating the good, procure honour and advantage to themselves, and to the republic of letters. I have taken care to stigmatise the introducers of any new and dangerous mode of composition, and likewise to point out the authors I thought most worthy of applause. More
fully

fully, however, to gratify the lovers of literature, and assist those who would wish to follow the best models, it would be a very proper undertaking for a man of discernment and learning to compare the productions of the various nations, ancient and modern. In discoursing of the different branches of literature, I mean poetry of every kind, history, oratory, works of morality, instruction, and criticism, he might remark the characteristic qualities of celebrated writers, distinguish their faults from their excellencies, and ascertain what is worthy of imitation. By these means authors would be enabled to cull beauties even from inferior compositions, and reject blemishes, from which the best are not exempted. In an age so polished, so fruitful of books, a work like this, now more necessary than ever for the support

port of literature, will, I hope, soon appear. The great models of antiquity have been already copied over and over, so that it is impossible to write any thing valuable if we imitate them alone; and to confine ourselves to the moderns of any particular nation would be still worse. He therefore who wishes to distinguish himself ought carefully to select from both what shall appear to him least trite; and by novelty of style, order, and disposition, appropriate it to himself. But the proposed work must greatly assist him in his choice. Whoever attempts it may give it an agreeable, insinuating air by inserting the most curious and interesting anecdotes in the annals of literature, and those minute particulars, which put in motion great undertakings and revolutions in the literary as well as in the political world. After all, he must himself perceive
the

the proper form more clearly than I can describe it. If this ESSAY shall prompt him to the undertaking, or serve in any measure for an introduction to it, the end of its publication is answered.

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

Page 11 line 14. from *thence*---read, from *them*.

P. 16. l. 8. 9. particularly SAPPHO---r. particularly *on* SAPPHO.

P. 17. l. 15. *the* scaffold---r. *a* scaffold.

P. 25. l. 9. *more* great---dele *more*.

P. 32. l. 6. 7. in a short time it was cultivated---r. in a short time, involved in scholastic darkness, it was cultivated.

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